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PHOTO: Cor Vos

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OFF THE FRONT

SNAKE ALLEY

The peloton descends Grimes Canyon Road during stage 5 of the 2015 Amgen Tour of California from Santa Barbara to Santa Clarita. A strong downpour helped end the chances of the day's breakaway, setting up a sprint finish won by Mark Cavendish (Etixx-Quick-Step), his third of the race.

PHOTO BY CASEY B. GIBSON





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United by bikes

Italy and California may be thousands of miles apart, but there are countless similarities between their splendid landscapes and comfortable climates. It helps that the Giro d'Italia and Amgen Tour of California overlap on the racing calendar as well.

Further uniting the two locales is Eroica California, a celebration of the golden age of Italian cycling, transported to the Pacific shores of America and the small city of Paso Robles, where the hazy hills and dirty roads feel much like Tuscany.

I had the pleasure of riding the first annual California vintage revival, on a borrowed Crayola orange De Rosa, the tubular glue still wafting through the air as I re-familiarized myself with the art of kicking into toe clips.

The day started and ended spectacularly, but I did have a chance to learn a bit more about suffering and sacrifice along the way.

My first tubular puncture came at mile 40. That's when my new friend and riding mate Chuck Teixeira became my impromptu guide to the essence of 1974.

It can be done, trust me, said Chuck's poise.

And I did, until mile 60, when things got a bit more difficult. Puncture *numero due*. I had no more tires. But I had Chuck, who insisted I take his spare.

"No way! I'll figure something out. I can't take that from you," I said.

"Yes, come on, take it. It's a long walk out and it's good karma for me," he said. Then he started

up the climb of Cypress Mountain, knowing I'd likely catch him by the top.

Standing beside the road under a blazing sun, I was quick to realize this was an essential experience to understanding the full breadth of the golden age. All alone and desperate for a solution, I needed only my wits to carry on.

Only 200 meters up the road, I was standing next to Chuck again. This time, it was he who had punctured. "I'm going to need that tire back, Chris."



It was not our day; while

Chuck rode into the shadows, my day instantly became a bit harder. With one good tire and a very small cluster of gears, the only way out of this dilemma was to ride to the top of the steepest climb of the day.

I knew my inaugural Eroica was nearing its end. And then I saw the vaporous haze of Pacific Ocean views. An aid station. Not a tubular in sight, and 13 sinuous miles of catastrophic tarmac between me and the town of Cambria.

Hero status would have to wait until next time.

I was offered a ride down the mountain. Jim was the proud owner of the most appropriate sag wagon there could be for this day: a 1969 Alfa Romeo Giulia 1300 TI, adorned with a checkered flag racing stripe, one roof-rack tray, and red vinyl seats. We swooshed down the mountain toward the sea in a piece of vintage Italian machinery.

There is much to celebrate about days like these, filled as they are with a deep passion for cycling and its rich history, and the effort and camaraderie discovered only on a difficult ride.

It's exactly those sentiments that fill the pages of this issue, a celebration of the most passion-filled race on the planet, the Giro d'Italia, as well as the most thrilling edition of the Tour of California.

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— CHRIS CASE
Managing editor



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WHAT IS THE LONGEST RIDE YOU'VE EVER DONE?

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Dirty Kanza, 205 miles
24 Hours in the Sage, 143 miles
Ride on Chicago, 126 miles
Colorado Rapha Gentleman's Race, 112 miles
Belgian Waffle Ride, 131 miles
Zinn Fondo, 222 miles
Gran Fondo Giro d'Italia Miami, 100 miles
Leadville 100, 104 miles

160 miles
130 miles

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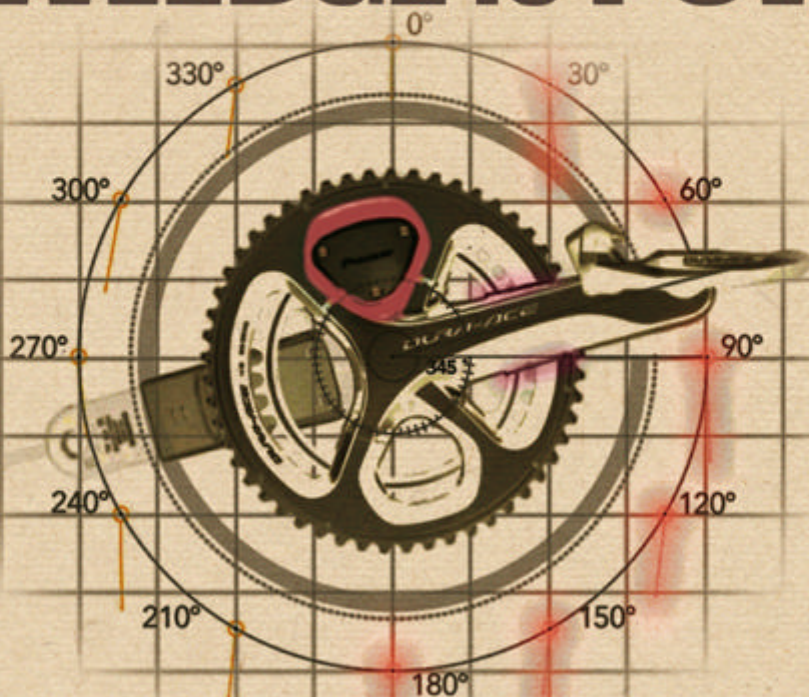
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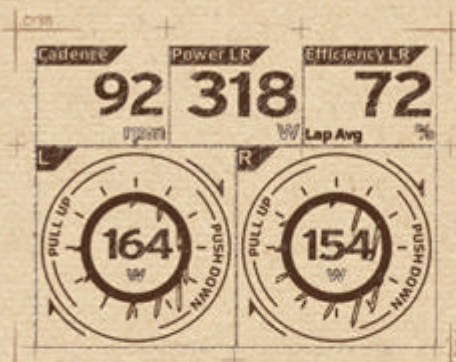


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Follow the yellow brick road

This year's Tour favorites are taking very different paths to France *By Andrew Hood*

The cycling world is living in bountiful times, and July should see an unprecedented harvest. For the first time in decades, the Tour will start with four legitimate, five-star favorites. Dubbed the “Fantastic Four,” Chris Froome (Team Sky), Nairo Quintana (Movistar), Alberto Contador (Tinkoff-Saxo), and defending champion Vincenzo Nibali (Astana) all start with realistic chances to win.

This hotly contested battle is in sharp contrast to the dynamic of the past several decades when one larger-than-life figure dominated their respective eras. Eddy Merckx and Miguel Indurain had no true rivals when they were at the top of their games. They were simply in another league, and everyone else started the Tour with lesser ambitions than the yellow jersey.

This July, the cycling world will witness what could be one of the greatest GC battles in Tour history. Four riders will arrive at the start in Utrecht at the top of their powers, with realistic and

proven chances to win. Three of the contenders have already won the yellow jersey — Contador, Froome, and Nibali — and Quintana, who won the 2014 Giro d'Italia and was Tour runner-up in 2013, is hailed by many as the best raw talent since Merckx. As Froome and Contador witnessed last year, no one is immune to misfortune. But if all four ride deep into the Tour with their GC chances fully intact, July could be one for the history books.

This month, *Velo* examines these four principal favorites, their respective roads to the Tour de France, and what's at stake.

ALBERTO CONTADOR (TINKOFF-SAXO), 32 2007 AND 2009 TOUR DE FRANCE CHAMPION

APPROACH TO THE TOUR: Unlike his main rivals, Contador is taking aim at history, trying to become just the eighth rider to win the historic Giro-Tour double. No one's been able to pull off that feat since Marco Pantani in 1998. Contador held up the first part of the bargain, winning a hard-fought Giro

d'Italia in May. The presence of the Giro altered Contador's racing schedule dramatically. He had the latest start to the racing season among the top favorites, not racing until the Ruta del Sol in Spain in February, yet will start the Tour with the most race days in his legs, with 44, counting his planned start at the Route de Sud in late June. “The Giro-Tour double is something I've thought about for a long time,” Contador explained. “It's a new challenge, it helps me stay motivated. And I've wanted to end my career at my peak. I don't know if it's possible, but it drives me.”

WHAT'S AT STAKE: Contador is still smarting from his 2010 disqualification after his controversial clenbuterol case. He raced the 2011 Tour short on form, after winning the Giro earlier in the year (both results were erased due to his backdated two-year ban), and was forced to miss the 2012 Tour. In 2013, Froome and Sky shelled Contador, where he failed to flaunt his former



**"THE GIRO-TOUR
DOUBLE IS SOMETHING
I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT
FOR A LONG TIME."**

— Alberto Contador

dominance in the mountains. Last year, after a superb spring, Contador's luck ran out when he crashed in the Vosges. In many ways, Contador is the best grand tour rider of his generation, and he desperately wants another yellow jersey before retiring. His self-imposed challenge of the Giro-Tour double speaks volumes about his ambition and self-confidence.

WHERE HE'S BEEN TRAINING: Since winning the Giro in May, Contador took a well-deserved rest at his European base in Lugano, Switzerland, before returning to altitude. His shot at the Giro-Tour double makes his preparation the most complicated among the "Fab Four." The Spaniard must balance recovery with training, with an eye on trying to arrive to the Tour as fresh as possible, yet with the legs to go the distance in the decisive final week. Contador added the Route du Sud (June 18-21) to his schedule to put some race speed in his legs before the Tour. After winning the Giro, Contador admitted it would not be easy: "I went a little deeper in this Giro than I had hoped to, but the important thing was to secure the pink jersey. I still believe I can be competitive at the Tour, but with the hard racing, the dislocated shoulder, the demands of the Giro, I am leaving this Giro tired."

STAGE RACE RESULTS IN 2015: 2nd, Ruta del Sol; 5th, Tirreno-Adriatico; 4th, Vuelta al País Vasco; 1st, Giro d'Italia (40 race days by early June)

CHRIS FROOME (TEAM SKY), 30

2013 TOUR DE FRANCE CHAMPION

APPROACH TO THE TOUR: Froome's spring was inconsistent; he beat Contador in a showdown at Ruta del Sol, then got sick at Catalunya, before getting pipped at the Tour de Romandie, where he had won the two previous editions. He will have the least number of race days when he arrives in Utrecht. For Froome, the Tour will be a measuring stick for the 2015 season. "We're all as hungry as

ever. We are hungry for another success at the Tour de France," Froome said earlier this season. "Partly due to what happened last year, I am as motivated as ever."

WHAT'S AT STAKE: Froome wants another yellow jersey to quiet the chatter that somehow his 2013 Tour victory will be a one-off. The Kenyan-born rider arrived to last year's Tour in top form, but a crash in stage 4 quickly deflated his repeat dreams. Sky, too, is motivated by the rise of rival squads, such as Movistar, Tinkoff-Saxo, and Astana, which have all but copied much of the British team's methodology. Anything less than another yellow jersey will be considered a failure.

WHERE HE'S BEEN TRAINING: In 2015, Froome is not breaking any new ground, and is sticking to Sky's well-worn approach to the Tour, with weeks of training at altitude atop the Teide volcano on Tenerife. He will race the Critérium du Dauphiné in June as a final pre-Tour test. "After what happened last year, that means that I am coming into this season feeling even more eager to be at the best possible place at the start line for the Tour," Froome said. "This year, I want to crash less, stay healthy, and be ready for the Tour."

STAGE RACE RESULTS IN 2015: 1st, Ruta del Sol; 71st, Volta a Catalunya; 3rd, Tour de Romandie (19 race days by early June)

VINCENZO NIBALI (ASTANA), 30

2014 TOUR DE FRANCE CHAMPION

APPROACH TO THE TOUR: Much like Froome, Nibali is sticking to a similar plan to 2014. His approach to last year's Tour was so unspectacular that few pundits gave the Sicilian much of a chance. He quickly proved everyone wrong. Astana's tumultuous off-season, when it nearly lost its WorldTour license, seemed to have little or no impact at all on the Sphinx-like Nibali. This spring, his results have been as dismal as they were last year. In fact, he's the only contender who has not won a race in 2015. "The most important thing is to be ready for the Tour," Nibali said. "No one remembers if you win a race in March. They do remember if you lose the Tour."

WHAT'S AT STAKE: The mantra for 2015 is 'repeat.' Nibali didn't want to risk crashing or getting sick by taking unnecessary risks during the spring. No one's repeated at the Tour since Lance Armstrong's now-disqualified seven-year streak ended in 2005. Nibali is doubly motivated to win if Contador and Froome are in the race. Their exit last year led to murmurs that his 2014 win came easy. "Winning a second Tour is almost harder than the first. There

is more pressure, and everyone is watching you," said Astana sport director Giuseppe Martinelli. "The most important thing is confirmation of last year's victory. If Nibali can do that, he will be the best of his generation."

WHERE HE'S BEEN TRAINING: Nibali has all but lived on Teide since May, often sharing the same hotel with Contador and Froome atop the charred summit of the volcano. Like Froome, he will race at the Dauphiné, but if he's sticking to his plan, don't expect fireworks in June; he's only looking to July.

STAGE RACE RESULTS IN 2015: 39th, Dubai Tour; 20th, Tour of Oman; 16th, Tirreno-Adriatico; 10th, Tour de Romandie (27 race days by early June).


NAIRO QUINTANA (MOVISTAR), 25

2013 TOUR RUNNER-UP

APPROACH TO THE TOUR: As if there was any doubt of his talent, Quintana confirmed his credentials with a superb victory at Tirreno-Adriatico. His attack on Contador, who was uncharacteristically caught out of position on the Terminillo climb, was majestic. In April, Quintana raced a pair of one-day races over the pavé to get a taste for the cobblestones, but since then he's been a touch off his best. Movistar insists Quintana is saving his matches for July. "The Tour is the most important race on the calendar, and that's what I am focusing on right now," Quintana said. "Other races are important, like the Giro, which I was fortunate enough to win last year, but for 2015, I want to be in top condition for the Tour, and aim for the maximum result."

WHAT'S AT STAKE: Quintana was the revelation of the 2013 Tour, winning the King of the Mountain and young rider's jerseys, a mountain stage, and finishing second overall, the best by a Latin American in Tour history. Many hail Quintana as the best raw talent in a generation, and this mountainous Tour route seems tailor-made for his explosive climbing style. "Nairo is very determined, and reminds me a little bit of Miguel Indurain, in his ability to win the races he targets," Movistar boss Eusebio Unzué said. "Whether Nairo wins the Tour this year or not remains to be seen, but I am sure he will win the Tour some day. He is one of those riders who comes along once in a generation."

WHERE HE'S BEEN TRAINING: There's no need to spend weeks on Teide's desolate 11,000-foot summit when you live at 9,000 feet in the heart of the Andes. Unlike his direct rivals, Quintana can simply go home to Colombia and reap the benefits of altitude. Like Contador, he is scheduled to race the Route du Sud before the Tour to put some race miles in his legs.

STAGE RACE RESULTS IN 2015: 3rd, Tour de San Luis; 1st, Tirreno-Adriatico; 4th, Vuelta al País Vasco; 8th, Tour de Romandie (32 race days by early June). 

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“We have an expression in Italy, ‘Ochowicz missed a good opportunity to keep his mouth shut.’”

— Gianni Savio, manager of Pro Continental team Androni-Sidermec, in response to Jim Ochowicz’s comments that lower-tier teams should be removed from major WorldTour races



“We’ll have a good dinner tonight, although I have to watch my weight for the Tour.”

— Alberto Contador (Tinkoff-Saxo), after winning the Giro d’Italia

“We have to adhere to a higher standard than Pro Continental teams. And those standards that are not met by Pro Continental teams, in some cases, lead to situations in the race that wouldn’t be there otherwise.”

—Jim Ochowicz, general manager of BMC Racing



“This is the first time in a mountain stage that I’ve gotten to see [Alberto] Contador finish on TV.”

— Philippe Gilbert (BMC Racing), after his breakaway win on stage 18 of the Giro d’Italia

“It’s the stupidest thing. It’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard of. It’s not possible. It’s just not possible.”

— Ryder Hesjedal (Cannondale-Garmin), after his bike was inspected for a motor by the UCI after stage 18 of the Giro d’Italia



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ONE OF MANY
Fabian Cancellara dons
the yellow jersey for the
first time in 2004.

Supply and demand

Tour de France stage wins may be plentiful, but they remain one of the sport's most coveted prizes *By Ryan Newill*

Since the dawn of the millennium fifteen years ago, 135 different riders have etched their names into the record books as Tour de France stage winners — dozens more if you count all the men who contributed to wins in nine team time trials. Those men have seized on 324 opportunities (prologues included) to earn one of the sport's most instantly transformational victories, some multiple times, others just once. Compared to the scarcity of cycling's other top prizes — the five monuments, the three grand tours, a world championship title — Tour stages present some appealing odds.

For those members of cycling's top tier not destined for GC greatness, monumental glory, or rainbow stripes, winning a Tour stage is the most attainable piece of bona fide cycling stardom. No other stage win and few one-day races offer the same rewards or recognition. And the Tour offers that chance to every type of rider, from stoutest rouleur to willowy climber. So, despite the healthy supply of Tour stages in the marketplace, demand pushes their worth near the top of the sport's value chain. A journeyman domestique or Coupe de France hero might not dare to

consider winning Il Lombardia or a yellow jersey, but if everything plays out right — if he makes the break, if the GC leaders and their teams need a rest between mountain ranges, if the sprinter's teams time it wrong — he just might be able to stand on the sport's biggest stage for a few precious minutes.

And it is a big stage. Estimates for total television viewership vary widely, but most put the number north of 1 billion. By Tour organizer ASO's sometimes optimistic estimate, some 12 million people stand in town squares and on mountainsides and in fields to watch it pass each summer. Win a stage, and, more than in any other bike race, the eyes of the world are upon you, from die-hard cycling fans to grandmothers out for a picnic. For the rest of your life, you have proof that you not only reached the de facto pinnacle of the sport, but emerged victorious, if only for a day.

As important as they are to a stage hunter, the value of a stage win isn't lost on the men fighting for the Tour's bigger honors. For those candidates for the yellow, green, and polka-dot jerseys, stage wins are an important accessory, proof of a

victory achieved with panache rather than cool, calculated riding. Peter Sagan is the latest Tour jersey winner to feel the sting of a stage win's absence, taking the green jersey in 2014 without the swashbuckling wins that had leant his two previous titles undeniable credibility and forced the cycling world to take a young, swaggering kid seriously.

It's no new phenomenon. In 1990, the year Sagan was born, Greg LeMond's dramatic, race-long pursuit of the unexpectedly tenacious Claudio Chiappucci featured plenty of drama and inspired riding, but the American never crossed the line first as he rode to his last Tour win. Without that defining moment — the stopped clock of a winning time trial, the victory salute of a road stage — even the grandest victory in Paris can feel lacking.

A Tour stage win is also, often, a trumpet blast that signals an arrival, a first foothold on the climb to the sport's highest summits. Before he became the Lion of Flanders, Johan Museeuw roared in France in 1990, first in the dash to Mont-Saint-Michel and again on the Champs-Élysées. Fabian Cancellara's talents

first came to widespread attention when he crushed all comers in the 2004 prologue to wear yellow at the age of 23. Four world time trial championships and seven victories in three of the sport's five monuments would follow. And back in 1989, high in the Pyrenees at Luz Ardiden, a domestique for defending champion Pedro Delgado seized an opportunity to ride for himself. Miguel Indurain bagged the stage and wore polka dots for a day, but returned to make yellow his own for the next five years.

For many, though, a Tour stage win is the summit, not a stepping stone; it is a career-defining achievement never to be bettered or even equaled again. It can mark the upper limit of talent for those who consider themselves race winners, or simply a shining moment in the life of an avowed domestique. Some, like Frenchman Pierrick Fédrigo, develop a knack for the Tour stage win, finding repeated success in the Tour's pressure cooker that never quite extends to other events. But is that so bad? Victory at the Tour means a contract for the next year, bonuses, endorsements, and, if you believe the old saying, never the need to buy a beer again. Every stage winner comes from somewhere, and wherever it is, there's a good chance there's a cycling fan willing to buy a round just to hear the story again.

All Tour stage wins have value, whether in beer or bonuses, panache or prediction, but not all are valued equally. Unfair, perhaps, but true. In the hierarchy of Tour stages, elevation elevates. Victories in the Alps and the Pyrenees are the building blocks of legends, while the transitional stages between them are often written off as cease-fire days in the broader GC war.

Win on Mont Ventoux, for example, and your name goes down beside Gaul and Poulidor, Merckx and Thevenet. Win on Alpe d'Huez, and they put your name on a sign on one of those 21 famous hairpins — forever. Even Lance Armstrong's name, purged from official Tour records, still marks hairpins number 19 and 21 for his 2001 and 2004 Alpe wins. And hairpin number one, that final, agonizing bend before the race launches toward the line in the ski village? That pride of place belongs to Giuseppe Guerini, who proved to be ahead of his time by getting knocked off his bike by a fan with a camera en route to victory in 1999. But Guerini's gutsy solo win through the Massif Central at the tail end of the 2005 Tour? All but forgotten.

Compared to the rarified air of the mountains, victories in the flat heat of the field sprints are treated not as works of art, but as commodities. The locales are not legendary and their names mostly forgotten, reduced to one more tick mark in the raw tallies used to compare the sport's legendary fast men. The man who all but created the supersprinter genre, Mario Cipollini topped out at 12 wins at the Tour, before his habit of quitting before the race hit the mountains made him a persona non grata. His foil, the more versatile but less rapid Erik Zabel managed 12


as well, as did Robbie McEwen, who unlike the blinding Cipollini remained all but invisible until 100 meters go. And then came Mark Cavendish. By the end of his third Tour, he'd surpassed them all and tied Freddy Maertens' total of 15.

Cavendish's count now lies at 25, tying him with heroic-era Frenchman André Leducq for third on the all-time stage wins list, with time left on the clock and favorable conditions coming into the 2015 Tour. Marcel Kittel, who racked up a near Cav-like 8 stages in his first three tours, looked ready to stanch the flow, but after a disastrous early season, Kittel's chances of a good Tour are receding. Cavendish's form appears to be on the rise.

But despite the competition, Cavendish and the other sprinters will be well served if Kittel makes the start in Utrecht, because his presence will remove the chief criticism the sprinters will face should they find success at this year's Tour: namely, that without Kittel — the Tour's dominant sprinter for two years running — their victories will somehow be worth a bit less.

Such complaints are frequent in the immediate aftermath of any stage win, but their shelf life is short. In years, if not weeks, the context, caveats, and mitigating circumstances fall away from all but the most storied stage wins, regardless of terrain. Nobody remembers that the winning break was all but forgotten as a cat-and-mouse GC battle raged down the mountain, that the top sprinter got pinched against the barrier and had to brake, or that the winning mark in the time trial was set before the wind and rain swept in for the afternoon starters.

All of those facts are there for those who seek them, tucked into detailed histories, tattered magazine articles, and forgotten nooks of the web. But few bother to look. There are 21 new stages worth of stories each year, and the stage winner's is just one among many. What's the use in remembering that Traversoni's 1997 win came only after Voskamp and Heppner were disqualified, or that Andre Greipel and Cavendish's prosperous 2012 Tours came while Kittel battled and lost to a stomach bug, or that, in that same Tour, reigning world champion Tony Martin flatted in both the prologue and first individual time trial, won by Cancellara and Bradley Wiggins? No victory is achieved in a vacuum.

For the most part, only the stark truth is left in popular memory — the rider, the year, perhaps the name of a town or a mountain or an image of upstretched arms. The adulation fades, contracts come and go, careers end, the story is relegated to the barroom and the café. Only the honor and the line item on the palmares remain. And each July, like clockwork, 21 new opportunities spring forth to be fought over by 198 men hungry to claim their own piece of cycling's most valuable property. 

Ryan Newill has contributed to *Velo* since 1999. Follow him on Twitter at @SC_Cycling.

WINNING

EL PISTOLERO

Alberto Contador erased any doubts that he is the best stage racer of his generation



TERMINATOR RETURNS

Peter Sagan's victory at the Amgen Tour of California was as thrilling as it was unexpected



OLEG TINKOV

Russian oligarch applies pressure. Sagan wins California, Contador wins Giro



STRONG ARM. STRONG HEART

Kristin Armstrong solidified her place on the U.S. worlds team with a national TT title after coming back from retirement

CONTENDER CATASTROPHE

Tasmanian Richie Porte was bedeviled at another grand tour, while Rigoberto Urán flailed in his attempt to improve upon his two previous podium finishes



SECOND IS THE FIRST LOSER

Cannondale-Garmin botches the numbers game at road nationals to come away empty handed



FRIENDS OR ENEMIES?

The UCI gets a black eye after punishing good sportsmanship between compatriots Porte and Clarke on different teams

LOSING

Ask a Pro

Deep philosophical advice from
a roadie sage by Phil Gaimon



Is there a race on the calendar where all the competitors agree to race completely drunk? That would be awesome.

This is a stupid question, so what does it say about me that I have an answer? At collegiate mountain bike nationals, there used to be an unsanctioned “naked crit.” That’s probably the closest you’ll come to drunk, but as I understand it, Tramadol isn’t far off, and some teams still use that in races. A few months ago, my 84-year-old grandmother started taking Tramadol for pain. We had a fight about it and she was kicked out of the MPCC. Then she stopped because it made her too loopy; she couldn’t concentrate on her puzzles. Something tells me that if Tramadol made it hard for Granny to pick out corner pieces, riders might be impaired ripping through corners on wet cobblestones. Some might consider that awesome.

Do you work on your own bikes?

At races, the team mechanics handle that for us. At home, I like to know how to work on my own bike, out of principle: A professional should understand his equipment. I think I do a decent job of it, but if you said that to anyone who works at the bike shops I visit in my neighborhood, they’d never stop laughing. They might also share a story about when I showed up with my rear wheel jammed into the front fork, or a derailleur screwed into my thumb.

How does your girlfriend deal with you being gone for long training camps and stage races?

When I leave home, she climbs into a cryogenic freezer, preserved until my return. Okay, that’s not true, but it would be cool if I could afford it. We just have a regular freezer, which wouldn’t be comfortable. She goes about her business, we talk on the phone, and I’m sure there’s plenty of upside to having me out of the house, such as peace and quiet, fewer grease stains on the sofa, and, of course, the leftovers don’t disappear out of the (non-cryogenic) freezer so fast.

Do riders always obey their team directors? Have you ever gone rogue and hatched your own plan? What’s the punishment if a rider goes against the team?

Back in the old days of race radios, there were a couple times when I pulled out the earpiece (and claimed that it wasn’t working), but I don’t think I ever blatantly disobeyed my team. Like any job, if you have a specific task, and you decide to do something else, you’re fired pretty quickly. That being said, if you win, the director will probably applaud your effort and act like whatever you did was actually his idea. If it doesn’t work out, I’ve noticed that you can get dropped and finish minutes behind, but if you wheelie across the finish line, all is forgiven. I never learned how to wheelie.

Phil Gaimon races for Optum-Kelly Benefit Strategies. His website is philthethrill.net.

TOM MORAN



JOE DOMBROWSKI



MATEJ MOHORIC



BEN KING



DAVIDE FORMOLLO

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cannondale

Sitting In with Mauro Vegni

By Andrew Hood | La Spezia, Italy

It's the start of stage 5 of the 2015 Giro d'Italia, but it could be any day. It's hot, it's noisy, it's chaotic. It's the Giro.

A press attaché from RCS Sport escorts *Velo* under the awning of the super-VIP zone in the central piazza of La Spezia. Giro d'Italia director Mauro Vegni is a busy man. The 56-year-old has his hands full during the frenetic three weeks each May when the Giro takes over Italy. For nearly 30 minutes Vegni reflects on the Giro, a possible start in the U.S., and extreme weather protocols. Then, it's back to the races.

You've been the Giro director for a few years now. Where do you hope to see the Giro in 10 years?

The Giro of the future should be more and more international. The Giro can serve as an ambassador of Italy to the world. We can never forget the values of our sport, and we have to focus on the athletes. The Giro is a fantastic 'stage,' but the cyclists are the actors. We must always search for the balance between the modern and tradition.

The Giro garners more attention every year in the United States. What ever happened to plans to bring the 'grande partenza' to the U.S.?

We are very happy that the Giro is growing year to year in the U.S., because it's a very important market for us. And Italy is a country that Americans look to with a lot of interest, not only in terms of the race, but also the landscapes, the food, and history. My thoughts are that in a world that is ever more global, international events such as the Giro, the Tour de France, and others should be able to [travel] to every type of country to promote our sport. The Giro in the United States could be an opportunity closer than people think. We want to go into important non-European countries, with growing economies, such as the U.S. and East Asia.

How important is it to the Giro that Alberto Contador targeted the Giro-Tour double this season?

I believe Contador's presence is important in any race. I don't want to be offensive to others, but Contador has been the strongest for the past 15 years, so of course his presence is very nice for the Giro. The double? It's only something to be tried by a great champion. We have riders who do the Giro and no Tour. Or win the Tour, and never the Giro. The fans want the best riders in all the races. They want the confrontation, to know who is the best. It should be like the Champions League [in soccer], but today this is missing in modern cycling. Before, we had the great rivalries, Moser-Saronni, Coppi-Bartali. We have big riders, but no one single rider is building the interest among the fans today. We need this dualism, this rivalry.

How disappointing is it for the Giro that defending champion Nairo Quintana did not return? I could give you an answer, but it won't be what I am really thinking [laughs]. Perhaps riders like to win the Giro first, because later the Tour seems easier. Until four or five years ago, the first half of the Tour was different — it was an easier race. Now, perhaps they have looked to the Giro and have made the first part of the Tour much more difficult. Until a few years ago, the Giro was a much harder race than the Tour. What is sure is that the Giro is a fundamental point in a rider's career. So the Giro is now on the level of the Tour. It's true that the Tour was able to position itself as the most prestigious race in cycling, in terms of branding and marketing, but we have seen that difference become smaller over the past 10 to 15 years. A riders' palmares is not complete until they win a Giro.

The Giro always seems to have the worst weather among the major tours. What is your opinion of having an "extreme weather" protocol? This is a very complicated issue. How can you put limits on the weather? It changes by the moment. You cannot say what will happen in an hour's time, or imagine what will happen at the finish line, seven hours before. For example, they want to put a number on the temperature. What will it be? 125 degrees? And if it goes above it by one degree in the middle of the race, stop the race? That would be the end of cycling. The only answer is common sense. I am a member of the commission that is studying this issue, but we are discovering it is difficult to define the parameters. There are many factors. And what can we do? Stop the race? Delay it? In the end, you need common sense. You must respect the rider.



CASTELLI

The Aero Race 5.0 Jersey.
For the breakaways in which every second counts.

CASTELLI-CYCLING.COM

FASHIONISTA CICLISTA

Closet looking dated? These cycling kits are all about smart design, good looks, and a fabulous fit

By Logan VonBokel

Nothing kills the good vibe of a ride quicker than discomfort, whether from an ill-positioned seam or chafing fabrics. Smart clothing designers know you rely on their product to keep you going all day, which is why the market is saturated with various fabrics and cuts. Wherever and whatever you ride, the golden rule always applies: comfort is key.

Of course, it never hurts to look good. With an eye for functional details, our testers rode and reviewed some of the best kits on the market to find those that best combined comfort, style, and function.



VELOCIO

BRETON JERSEY \$169
SIGNATURE 2.0 BIB SHORTS \$219

★★★★★

For a long summer ride, the Velocio Breton jersey and Signature 2.0 bib short combo is an ideal choice. Stretchy jersey pockets comfortably hold more food and clothing than many other women's jerseys. The shorts kept us remarkably pain-free even four and five hours into a ride. Velocio also has a fine eye for style. The preppy Breton stripes and sleek, flattering cut of the shorts mean you'll want to wear the kit on rides of every length because it looks so darn good. The Breton jersey has a more relaxed cut than other Velocio jerseys, so if you're used to a tighter fit, consider sizing down.

PACTIMO

SUMMIT SPEED RFLX JERSEY \$115
RAPTOR PRO RFLX BIB SHORTS \$175

★★★★★

We've been testing Pactimo clothing for years, and the garments have gradually been getting better with each season's offerings. But Pactimo's styling has always been off the mark — until now.

The new Summit Speed RFLX jersey and Raptor Pro RFLX bibs are some of the best-looking and most comfortable offerings we've worn, and they're smartly priced. The jersey fits snugly, though the sleeves fit a bit looser than we'd prefer. Pactimo adds a touch of safety with highly reflective arm and leg bands that are attractively understated when they aren't bathed in the headlights of oncoming vehicles. The only addition we'd make is a small zippered pocket for our ID and credit card.

ORNOT

MEN'S JERSEY \$125
MEN'S BIB SHORT 2.0 \$155

★★★★☆

Ornot is likely the least recognizable brand on these pages, unless you live in California where the clothing is designed, sewn, and growing in popularity by the day.

Everything about the Ornot kit is simple. The shorts are basic, foregoing any reflective bits or aero fabrics and instead investing in a chamois that offers just the right amount of comfort and coverage without being bulky. The jersey features a few touches of color — mostly on the three back pockets — not to mention a lightweight mesh material in a fit that sits in the sweet spot between racy and club-cut. At \$280 for the pair, with free shipping on the web store, the Ornot kit is the least expensive on these pages, but you wouldn't know it when you pull it on.



POC

RACEDAY CLIMBER JERSEY \$150
RACEDAY CONTOUR AEROFOIL BIB SHORTS \$350

★★★★☆

Don't let the price tag scare you away. We test bibs all the time, and more often than not, we stick with a few go-to shorts for long days in the saddle. The POC Raceday Contour bibs have become those go-to shorts.

They feature a 3D molded chamois, the same used in the less expensive \$250 Contour 3D bibs that would be perfect for most riders, unless you insist on the Aerofoil's dimpled fabrics.

The POC Climber jersey didn't blow us away, but the fit was great. Lightweight meshes like these tend to lack structure and sag when the pockets are loaded, but the Climber jersey still fit great even when full of gear.



ASSOS

SS.MILLE JERSEY EV07 \$159
T.NEOPRO S7 BIB SHORTS \$189

★★★★☆

We aren't all racing crits or fighting the wind in field sprints, so why dress that way? The Assos SS Mille Evo7 jersey offers a more relaxed fit — the loosest of any jersey on these pages — with comfortable fabric and ample pocket space for long-haul supplies. And big days in the saddle are no problem with the T.NeoPro s7 bibs, which have one of the best pads we've worn thanks to Assos' "Golden Gate" design. No, that's not a typo. The look is simple, albeit a bit dated, and the materials aren't particularly cutting-edge, but comfort never goes out of style.



LULULEMON

SEA TO SKY JERSEY \$128
SEA TO SKY BIB SHORTS \$158

★★★★☆

Every time we met up with the group ride in the Lululemon kit we fielded the same questions: What brand is that? When did Lululemon start making cycling clothing? Is it super expensive?

The Sea to Sky kit falls into a sweet spot: great looks and a comfortable fit. Subtle, reflective dots on the black bibs and black jersey (the jersey is also available in maroon) pop when reflecting a car's lights for an added bit of safety.

The cut of the jersey, like those of Blacksheep and Ornot, hits a happy medium between race-cut and baggy. The fabrics are a bit on the warm side, and even with mesh in the armpits and on the back it can get hot on sunny, summer days. The bibs are comfortable but came up a bit short in seam placement, most notably the stitch that runs right up the center of the chamois.

RAPHA

SOUPLESSE JERSEY \$175
SOUPLESSE BIBS \$260

★★★★☆

Rapha named its summer women's collection Souplesse, French for suppleness. It's an apt description, as the jersey and shorts are as buttery as they come. Fine fabrics and pinstripe detailing make for a refined look. The aesthetics are backed by a high performance, race-inspired fit. The minimalist bib straps are ideal for riders who are tired of heavy, wide straps weighing them down on hot days. While the Souplesse Jersey comes in a sleek and slimming black colorway, the royal blue version is a hue potent enough to transport you to a Côte d'Azur climb.



BLACKSHEEP

BLUE CHEVIOT KIT \$275

★★★★☆

Yes, the Blacksheep Blue Cheviot kit is a lot to take in, but it comes in an all-black version, too. If you love it, you're too late: Blacksheep sold through the entire run in a few days after unveiling this design.

Blacksheep has built its brand on limited-run, exceptionally vibrant kits. They now offer Essentials, which are subtle kits at a lower price that use the same bib and jersey designs as their more expensive cousins.

The jersey is comfortably snug and features great lightweight materials in the underarms and back; however, we're not a fan of the slick and shiny material used on the front. The bibs fit wonderfully and the chamois is great, though the bib straps are a bit thicker than we prefer.



ZIPP

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18 FRONT SPOKE COUNT
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LIMITED AVAILABILITY, UNLIMITED CAPABILITIES. From the designers of speed comes the 404 Firestrike Tubular, our most advanced wheel, period. All of our latest technologies crafted into one wheel for unmatched aero performance, durability and stability. Also available as a Carbon Clincher. Learn more at zipp.com

Brian Toone



Nothing about Brian Toone is average.

An assistant professor of computer science at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, Toone found a passion for cycling in junior high school. He has steadily ridden farther, higher, and more often ever since. Today, he averages 95 miles and 11,114 feet of climbing per ride; since the beginning of 2015, he has accumulated well over 1 million vertical feet in elevation gain, and hopes to rack up 3 million by year's end.

"I ride everywhere, so that really helps," Toone said. "About the only time I spend in the car is when I'm driving to races. This year with all my training for the Race Across America, I've just decided to ride to the races, do the race, and then ride home."

Exhibit A: After riding 85 miles to the start of the Fort McClellan road race, his goal was to simply finish the race, so he attempted to ride off the front of the field before the start of the day's steep climb. That didn't happen, and he missed

the winning break and the first chase group. But he continued to attack until he escaped the field. He finished a respectable 24th out of 129 starters. After the race, he rode home for a grand total of 255 miles for the day.

He has a family, two kids aged 8 and 10, and incorporates them and family time into his commitment to riding long.

"On a recent Friday I rode to the start of my son's baseball game, watched the game, and then rode all the way out to Cheaha and back [218 miles and 17,000 feet of climbing] to make it back just in time for the start of my son's Saturday morning baseball game," he said.

As much as the mileage and the time in the saddle, Toone loves to climb. He has completed two "Everestings" — a ride up and down the same stretch of a mountain road, racking up the elevation gain equivalent to the height of Mount Everest, 29,035 feet.

His first attempt was made on a minimal climb of some 520 feet. It required that he



"Before I started taking pictures of my Garmin on every single ride, I had rides flagged on a somewhat regular basis."

complete nearly 60 repetitions and 260 miles on the popular climb in Birmingham. He was joined by numerous friends throughout the day.

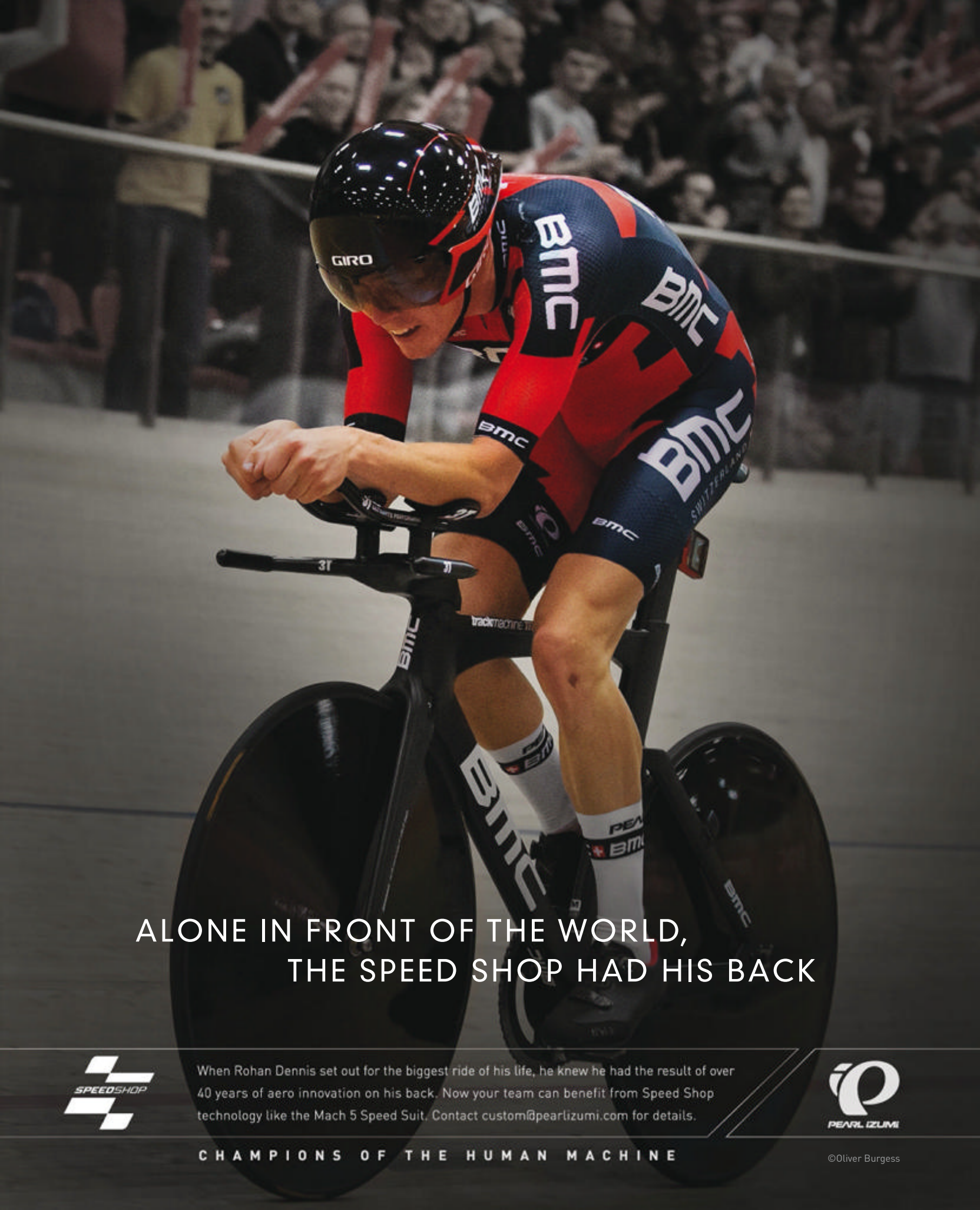
"There was only a two- or three-hour stretch in the middle of the night where I was completely by myself," Toone said. "During that time, I remember calculating and re-calculating why it was taking me so long to complete the Everesting, and repeatedly updating my ETA for finishing. I started mid-day on a Monday and didn't finish until Tuesday morning around 8 a.m., exceeding how long I thought it was going to take by close to 5 hours."

Toone posts all of his rides on Strava, including those to the ice cream shop. You'd think with the mileage and elevation gain he accumulates that he would have collected a gaggle of naysayers. And you'd be right. But he quickly found a solution.

"I don't think I've ever had a ride flagged because of the length of the ride, but rather the amount of climbing," Toone said. "Before I started taking pictures of my Garmin on every single ride, I had rides flagged on a somewhat regular basis, maybe once or twice a week during the climbing challenges, because people unfamiliar with the severe terrain of Birmingham couldn't understand how you can rack up many thousands of feet of climbing without huge climbs in the elevation profile. Once I started taking pictures of my Garmin during and after every ride and posting to Instagram immediately at the end of the ride, the flagging has stopped."

But you can be sure Toone hasn't.

— MADISON HOFERT

A professional cyclist, Rohan Dennis, is shown in a dynamic, aerodynamic pose on a time trial bike. He is wearing a black and red BMC team kit, a black Giro helmet, and white socks with BMC and Pearl Izumi logos. The bike is black with white BMC branding. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators, suggesting a high-stakes race environment.

ALONE IN FRONT OF THE WORLD, THE SPEED SHOP HAD HIS BACK



When Rohan Dennis set out for the biggest ride of his life, he knew he had the result of over 40 years of aero innovation on his back. Now your team can benefit from Speed Shop technology like the Mach 5 Speed Suit. Contact custom@pearlizumi.com for details.



CHAMPIONS OF THE HUMAN MACHINE

©Oliver Burgess

Passion play

The Giro d'Italia is an affair of the heart

BY ANDREW HOOD | IMOLA, ITALY
PHOTOS BY BRAKETHROUGH MEDIA



"The Giro is like the woman you fall in love with, and find her more beautiful every day of your life."

— GIANNI SAVIO

It's the start of stage 12, and you can hear it before you see it. The narrow medieval streets serve as an echo chamber for a distant roar. Shops, bars, and offices are resplendent in pink, dressed up as if it were time for a high school prom. Dip under a 100-foot ancient clock tower that looks like it came from the set of "Romeo and Juliet," and the passageway opens onto a sunny, packed piazza.

Music blares. Milling about are skinny podium girls, nearly as skinny as the stars of the show, but with high heels instead of cleats. Throngs of "tifosi" push and shout. Bored police scan the crowds. An announcer screams: "Ivan Basso! Grande campione!"

Team buses are scattered all over town. Riders zip back and forth to the sign-in area. Fans reach out for autographs and photos. There's nothing quite like it, and it's only the start of the day. It's impossible to define the Giro d'Italia by one word, but on this particular morning, passion oozes from every scene.

ITALIAN FLAVOR

A few hours later, the stars of the show are well into another day. As with most Giro stages, the race is harder than it looks in the technical guide. Today ends in Vicenza, with another dose of narrow roads, steep climbs, and a treacherous finishing circuit. Add an intense afternoon thunderstorm, and the Giro ingredients are complete. Philippe Gilbert (BMC Racing) dashes to what would be the first of two stage wins for the Belgian, and the circus is quickly packed and hauled away for the next stage.

The Italians weren't the first to think of the grand tour concept — that was the French with their race in 1903; the Giro didn't begin until 1909 — but they've created something very unique. The race is a reflection of its host: chaotic, disheveled, and nearly anarchic, yet at the same time charming, seductive, and sublime.

"The Giro is like the woman you fall in love with, and find her more beautiful every day of your life," explained the irrepressible Gianni Savio, the manager of Pro Continental squad Androni-Sidermec. "I've been to 33 Giri, and every year she gets more beautiful."

It's not uncommon to hear someone in and around the rolling Giro circus speak of the race in affectionate terms. It's as if they're describing a torturous love affair they know they should just end, but cannot.

"I've done 10 Giros during my career, and to



be honest, I have a love-hate relationship with this race," said Orica-GreenEdge's Brett Lancaster, who won the pink jersey in a one-kilometer opening prologue in 2005, a route that was long, straight, and very Giro. "Sometimes you think it's just madness — the noise, the chaos, the transfers — but then you're racing in Italy for a month. By far, it's the hardest bike race in the world."

The witty marketing folks at RCS Sport have embraced that link between beauty and difficulty: "The toughest race in the world's most beautiful place." Simply put, that is the Giro.

THE ONLY ONE

Behind the marketing campaigns, and the long-running rivalry with the Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia is unique on the racing calendar.

What it lacks in mainstream recognition, the Giro makes up for in passion. The "tifosi" of Italy are among the most passionate and dedicated in cycling. There are not many tour groups or foreign tourists who make the trek to see the Giro in May — though that number is rising as fans from around the world realize the pros are much more accessible at the Giro than the super-sized Tour — so in many ways, the Giro is pure Italy. It's loud, chaotic, but also authentic and unadulterated.

"There is a lot of chaos, commotion, and high drama at the Giro. The fans are loud, they're

boisterous, and it can be very exciting," said Brent Bookwalter (BMC Racing), a veteran of three Giros. "The enthusiasm from the fans is authentic. They really love the Giro, and that's conveyed to us. And we appreciate that, and it helps to inspire us to race harder."

Every major race reflects its host, be it the heat of the Vuelta a España, or the rain and mud of the northern classics. That's part of the allure and drama of bike racing. And Italy is like a rolling Fellini movie set. Elegant, charming, seductive, with brutally steep mountains and wildly unpredictable weather. The concept of "extreme weather protocol" was born thanks to the chaos over the snowbound Passo dello Stelvio in 2014.

"There is nothing straightforward about the Giro. Most stages have huge climbs. You're constantly on guard. The roads are twisting. You have to be a good bike rider," said Cannondale-Garmin's Tom Danielson. "On top of that, there are a lot of things going on. There are a lot of allergies, a lot of stuff blooming. The weather in the Dolomites, it can be snowing and raining up there. It's May. The race is so mountain-heavy in the end. The mountains we go up are true mountains. Every day you're at threshold. Up, down, left, right. Full concentration. The people are fantastic. There is really no reason why anyone should dislike the Giro. You just have to embrace the challenge."



PURO ITALIANO

Like any race, the Giro is held on open roads, which has provoked more than a few complaints from the pros over the years. Like much of southern Europe, Italy is not immune to the economic crisis that has led to cutbacks in social programs, education, and road repairs. Gaping potholes are scattered across the tarmac, even on major highways, but most locals are happy the Giro comes to town. To spruce things up for the race, local governments will often do some window dressing. One sign in a small village through which the race passed read, "Grazie il Giro, they finally paved our road!"

Beyond the chaos, the crowds, and the sometimes-lousy roads, there is the eternal magic of Italy. And the Giro is not shy about bringing the race to such places as the Coliseum in Roma or the flanks of the still-active Etna volcano. Perhaps no country in Europe is as topographically diverse, with the towering Dolomites and Alps in the north, to the treacherous Apennines down Italy's spine, and the arid, bleak expanses of the south. Set against the backdrop of Tuscany, Veneto, and Trentino, the Giro evokes drama and raw emotion.

"The Giro was always my favorite race of the year as a rider, and as a director, I like it even more," said Orica-GreenEdge's Matt White. "At

"To me, the Giro is as important as the Tour."

— ALBERTO CONTADOR

the Giro, you just have to go with the flow. The racing's great, and you never know what's going to happen. And the food? Come on, mate, way better than at the Tour."

Add the element of weather, and the Giro is extreme unlike any race in Europe. Conditions might be horrendous in Flanders in April, but riders are only racing for a day. Italy in May is a casserole of extremes, from sweltering heat to bone-chilling blizzards. The snowbound Passo Gavia stage made famous by the ride of Andy Hampsten in 1988 and the Stelvio disaster last year with Nairo Quintana (Movistar) are indelible moments in cycling history.

ONLY IN ITALY, NEVER IN FRANCE

How crazy can things be? In 2008, when Christian Vande Velde took the pink jersey after his Garmin-Chipotle team won the opening team time trial in Palermo, the team left him stranded at the press room. Unable to find a team staff person and without his mobile phone, he resorted to taking a taxi back to the hotel, still dressed in his racing kit and the pink jersey. The next

day, the team bus became so lost in the chaos and traffic of downtown Palermo that the team almost missed the start of the stage.

"It's part and parcel of a three-week race, and especially at the Giro; you have to take everything in stride. Parking takes awhile, traffic can be bad, it's chaotic," said Cannondale-Garmin sport director Charly Wegelius. "There's a saying in the team bus, 'e normale' — that's how it is — and if you take it to heart, you just put your head around it, and enjoy the Giro for what it is. It's a beautiful race."

There are certain things allowed at the Giro that would never happen at other races, especially at the more formal and traditional Tour de France. At the Tour, protocol and tradition carry the day, but the Giro is more adaptive and flexible. When Mario Cipollini showed up at the 1999 Tour dressed like Julius Caesar, wearing a toga and riding in a chariot, it enraged Tour brass, and it took another five years before the race invited the Italian back. In sharp contrast, the Giro embraced Cipollini's antics, and allowed him to wear a body suit in the 2005 prologue.

Patrick Lefevere, general manager of the

► MICHAEL MATTHEWS



NO SHORTCUTS

The Giro d'Italia's one of the biggest monuments and achievements for any pro cyclist and to reach glory you have to push yourself, time and time again. To raise your hands up at the Giro d'Italia, there is no escape. You have to sacrifice, you have to overcome the pain, and only your legs will make the difference to propel you in Pink on the top of the podium.



Etixx-Quick-Step team, recalled the 2005 Giro when Paolo Bettini won the maglia rosa. Wanting to raise the bar, the team had a team car painted entirely pink, waiting in a garage in Milano, in case Bettini grabbed the leader's jersey.

"The organization supported our idea. We wanted to bring a pink car for the pink jersey. They said, 'Why not?' We had the car in hiding, and drove it during the night to the race," Lefevere said. "The Giro is a different race. It's more familiar, more relaxed, and you have the good food and wine. That wouldn't happen at the Tour."

In 2010, Bookwalter finished two seconds away from taking the pink jersey, behind

Bradley Wiggins, in the opening prologue in Amsterdam. The next day, two women journalists approached him for an interview before the stage.

"They gave me the microphone, and hooked it under my jersey. Then they started fumbling with my jersey, looking for the microphone. Then, before I know it, my jersey's coming off, my bib straps are coming off. Later, I came to find out, they were from some sort of reality show, and they were going around to see how many items of clothing they could take off a rider before they said 'Enough is enough,'" Bookwalter remembered with a laugh. "This is very Giro. Something like this would never happen in the Tour."

HOW DO YOU SAY HARD IN ITALIAN?

Beyond the hijinks and off-the-road drama, the Giro almost always delivers a nail-biting fight on the road. Unlike the Tour, when just about every rider arrives in top form, the Giro sees a more diverse peloton. Beyond the top GC favorites, the Giro is often the race where younger, aspiring riders get a chance to spread their wings. This year saw victories by youngsters such as Davide Formolo (Cannondale-Garmin) and Jan Polanc (Lampre-Merida), both in their early 20s, racing alongside aging veterans such as Alessandro Petacchi (Southeast), who is in his 40s.

"I think it's the WorldTour version of the Milk Race in Ireland. I don't know of any other race when 56 riders go up the road and take a half an hour. Anything can happen here," said Cannondale's Wegelius. "That makes my life a bit stressful in the car, but it makes for a beautiful race. Of the three three-week races, it's the one that you don't know what you'll find when you turn the TV on."

And there's no denying the difficulty of the Giro. Most racers agree it is the most physically challenging race of the year. The main difference to the Tour is the speed and pressure that comes with the French race. But the days of taking it easy at the Giro seem to be gone. Riders agreed this year's edition was brutal from the start.

"The first half of the Giro this year was as hard as any race I've ever done, both in terms of speed and climbing," said Tinkoff-Saxo's Michael Rogers.


Eventual winner Alberto Contador (Tinkoff-Saxo) agreed that the 2015 edition was harder than his previous Giro victory. Why did he come back?

"There is something special about the Giro, the history, the fans, the mountains," Contador said. "As I am going into the last years of my career, I wanted to come back to the Giro again. To me, the Giro is as important as the Tour."

The Giro has evolved for the better over the past decade. It's reaching near-parity with the Tour de France. "We want the Giro to be positioned alongside the Tour, not below it," said Giro boss Mauro Vegni. "It's like a tennis player wants to win [the French Open at] Roland Garros as well as Wimbledon. They're equally important."

Former Giro director Angelo Zomegnan once demurred, "Imagine if the Giro were in summer," as his thoughts turned to visions of vacationing families, tourists, and fans thronging the roads similar to France each July.

As the Giro packed up for another season, eyes were already looking to the future. There are rumors of a possible start in the United States in 2017 to mark the Giro's 100th edition. Despite its glorious past, with the legendary battles of Coppi versus Bartali, Moser versus Saronni, the Giro is very much looking forward.

"The best Giro?" Savio pondered when asked of his favorite edition. "The one that's about to come next year, of course!" 

ENDURANCE ATHLETES USE CONTROVERSIAL METHOD TO BOOST PERFORMANCE

IS IT LEGAL?

BY MARK HANSEN

Ask endurance athletes about the three most controversial letters in sport and they will tell you: EPO. However, thanks to recent advances in sports nutrition, the discord surrounding EPO is now over. A company has produced a legal solution to the EPO problem.

EPO stands for Erythropoietin, a hormone that gives blood a greater capacity for carrying oxygen. Doctors first used EPO to counter red blood cell loss that resulted from chemotherapy treatment in cancer patients.

When synthetic EPO became available several decades ago, endurance athletes, especially cyclists, started using EPO to gain an advantage during training and races. The reason was simple: with more oxygen being delivered to muscles, performance and endurance improved dramatically.

In the mid-1980s, almost all of the governing bodies in sports banned EPO. Unfortunately, endurance athletes in several sports worked to get around these restrictions by using other blood doping techniques to mask EPO use.

The use of synthetic EPO has been extremely controversial. Several star endurance athletes have admitted using synthetic EPO and have faced severe consequences. The subject of EPO use has also gained significant media attention in the last 10 years.

Fortunately, there's a new legal way for cyclists and other endurance athletes to benefit from boosting EPO production. A company called Biomedical Research Laboratories has developed a natural EPO stimulator specifically for athletes seeking to gain an edge.

The product is called EPO-BOOST®. Taken daily, the ingredients in EPO-BOOST® help the body naturally boost circulating EPO levels. With a boost in EPO levels, more oxygen can reach working muscles resulting in dramatic



improvements in athletic performance.

The science behind EPO-BOOST® is equally compelling. Dr. M.T. Whitehead from the Department of Health and Human Performance at Northwestern State University conducted a 28-day double-blind placebo-controlled clinical trial to test the effectiveness of the key ingredient EPO-BOOST®.

The research showed that the active ingredient in EPO-BOOST® increased EPO production by over 90% compared to the group taking the placebo.¹ The supplement group showed significant improvements in athletic performance as measured by VO2max and running economy.

EPO-BOOST® is not a miracle pill and it won't make you a world champion overnight. In fact, most users will see that it takes 3-4 weeks to obtain the full performance benefits of EPO-BOOST®. Athletes who use EPO-BOOST® are sharing their results.

Joe Barr, who finished second in his category in the 2014 Race Across America (RAAM), used EPO-BOOST in his preparation for the race. Joe stated, "Since using EPO-BOOST I have finished top 5 in every World Ultra Marathon race I've entered. I've increased my VO2max and my hematocrit levels have increased from 43 to 47. In short, EPO-BOOST is the best supplement on the planet today."

Joey Mesa, a 2013 USA Cycling Masters Champion, stated, "I started using EPO-BOOST this racing season and can really tell a difference.

I'm feeling consistently great in all my races and the ability to keep going hard attack after attack is awesome! I've been racing bikes for over 30 years and tried lots of nutritional products, EPO-BOOST just plain works!"

So EPO-BOOST® provides a total solution for athletes in all sports looking for improved energy, endurance, and recovery. EPO-BOOST® is legal for competition. All ingredients in EPO-BOOST® are in compliance with WADA, UCI, IOC, and NCAA rules. Each batch of EPO-BOOST® is certified to be free of banned substances by the Banned Substances Control Group (BSCG) in Los Angeles.

Biomedical Research Laboratories offers a strong guarantee to back the product. Athletes can use EPO-BOOST® for a full 90 days. If the athlete is not fully satisfied in those 90 days, the athlete receives a prompt refund.

A company spokesman confirmed a special offer. If you order this month, you'll receive Free Enrollment into the company's "Elite Athlete Club" where you'll qualify to receive a full 25% discount on all bottles of EPO-BOOST®. And so you always have EPO-BOOST® in your system to increase your endurance, you'll automatically receive a fresh bottle every 30 days. There are no minimum amounts of bottles to buy and you can cancel at any time. You can order EPO-BOOST® today at www.EPOBOOST.com or by calling 1-800-780-4331.

¹ Whitehead et al. Int J Sport Nutr Exerc Metab, 17 (2007): 378-9.

KEY MOMENTS

STAGE 5

Davide Formolo shows his potential, escaping out of a large breakaway to finish seconds ahead of the lead GC riders. Ryder Hesjedal (Cannondale-Garmin) loses nearly five minutes, ending his GC ambitions.

STAGE 6

An amateur photographer clips Daniele Colli (Nippo-Vini Fantini), breaking his arm and setting off a chain reaction that results in Alberto Contador (Tinkoff-Saxo) dislocating his left shoulder.

STAGE 10

An untimely flat for Richie Porte (Team Sky) results in a great show of sportsmanship as compatriot Simon Clarke of Orica-GreenEdge lends him a wheel. However, such collusion between teams is against the rules, and the two-minute time penalty is the beginning of the end of Porte's Giro.

STAGE 14

Contador crushes the 59-kilometer time trial, taking massive time out of both Fabio Aru and Mikel Landa (both Astana).

STAGE 16

Astana, clearly the most powerful team in the race, takes advantage of a mechanical for Contador just 10 kilometers from the start of the famed Mortirolo climb. Contador's team brings him back, and his anger fuels a blistering counterattack that sees him catch and drop a lagging Aru.

STAGE 18

What goes around comes around: Contador takes advantage when Landa suffers a crash and wheel change on the road to Monte Olegno.

STAGE 20

Contador is distanced as the lead group winds its way up the Colle delle Finestre. Astana's Landa is pulled back to help teammate Aru, much to Landa's chagrin. If he hadn't already been up the road, and the Astana riders could have worked together, perhaps this Giro would have ended differently.





IN A LEAGUE OF HIS OWN

Alberto Contador's hard-fought Giro triumph sets him on the path for two grand tour victories in 2015

BY ANDREW HOOD
CASTIGLIONE DELLA PESCAIA, ITALY

Alberto Contador described it as a small pop. Standing behind the winner's podium at the end of a chaotic sprint in stage 6, Contador was counting his blessings.

When a fan reached over the barriers to snap a photo near the finishing line, it provoked a massive pileup. Daniele Colli (Nippo-Vini Fantini) got the worst of the crash; the Italian sprinter smashed, at full sprint speed, into the camera, shattering his shoulder and leaving spectators with an indelible image of his arm dangling at a grotesque angle onto the asphalt.

Contador, who always rides at the nose of the peloton, was caught in the domino effect of the finish-line pileup. He couldn't avoid toppling, and on impact his left shoulder took the brunt of the fall, popping out of its socket. Charged with adrenalin, Contador simply jiggled his arm and it slipped back into the envelope of muscle and tissue. Another quick check of



"At that moment, I really didn't think it was possible to continue in the Giro. I couldn't move my arm, so how was I going to race?"

— ALBERTO CONTADOR

himself revealed no broken bones; he slinked across the finish line, dazed but thankful he wasn't still on the ground.

Moments later, when he reached for the stairway railing of the podium, on his way to accept the maglia rosa, he heard it again: Pop! The shoulder came out once again. Contador couldn't believe it. He wiggled his arm and it slipped back in again, but Contador was unable to put on the pink tunic, and there would be no post-stage press conference. His season, and his audacious dream of winning the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France in the same year, seemed dashed in an absurd instant of Giro chaos.

"At that moment, I really didn't think it was possible to continue in the Giro," Contador later recounted. "I couldn't move my arm, so how was I going to race? How was I going to do the time trial? It was far from ideal."

This is Alberto Contador, one of the most fearless and determined riders in the peloton. He has overcome an amazing array of challenges and setbacks: a brain aneurism, a doping positive that he continues to deny was intentional, and a bitter co-habitation with Lance Armstrong in 2009. He wasn't going to let a relatively minor shoulder injury stop him from blazing ahead. Yet the very next day was the Giro's longest stage, a lumpy 264-kilometer epic. The decisive time trial, which would eventually tip the balance permanently in Contador's favor, was less than a week away.

A lesser rider might not have gotten off the tarmac after the crash, or managed to finish the next day's long march. But Contador was riding for something much bigger than the 2015 Giro. At

32, in what could be the penultimate season of his dramatically up-and-down career, he was riding to reclaim his place among the elite of the peloton. His controversial clenbuterol case of 2010 has left a stain on Contador's palmares that he wants to erase with something that is audacious and ambitious at the same time: the Giro-Tour double.

"That's when you see how determined Contador really is," said Tinkoff-Saxo sport director Stephen De Jongh. "That was a key moment in the race. Maybe a different rider would have quit. That is not the style of Alberto. He is a fighter."

Contador has been fighting for much of his career. And two weeks after that pop, the "Pistolero del Pinto" was popping open the bottles of champagne, victorious in Milano, officially claiming his second Giro d'Italia title. It was never easy, but no Giro ever is.

AUDACIOUS DREAM

Last winter, Contador determined how he wanted to end his career. At 32, he had already stated he wanted to exit through what the Spanish call the "puerta grande," like a toreador carried away on the shoulders of fans after slaying the beast in the arena. After extending his contract through 2016 with Tinkoff-Saxo, Contador wanted to do something big.

"When I leave cycling, I want to leave at the top of my powers. I don't want to hang around too long. I want to leave cycling at the absolute top," he explained. "That's when I started to think about both the Giro and the Tour. Some say it's impossible, but it's only impossible until

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Contador was unable to don the pink jersey after separating his shoulder on stage 6 (below), yet he was able to repeatedly fend off the strength of the Astana team.



someone does it."

The Giro-Tour double is one of cycling's milestones, a feat that's only been achieved seven times in history, only by the biggest names in the sport: Coppi, Merckx, Indurain. That is elite company, and that's where Contador wants to be. The last to do it was Marco Pantani in 1998, at the height of the EPO era, under rather dubious conditions. Since then, no one's even dared. Lance Armstrong, whose seven Tour de France victories have been erased from the history books, only cared about the maillot jaune. Since then, there have been a string of one-off grand tour winners. Contador's efforts to emerge as his generation's grand tour rider of reference have been stymied by a series of hurdles, setbacks, and challenges.

Contador has won two grand tours in one season — he won the Giro and Vuelta in 2008 — but the Giro-Tour is quite something else. His rivals looked on with awe when Contador decided to take on what many consider to be an impossible goal in modern cycling.

"If you're realistically looking to win the Tour, the double is a big ask," said archrival Chris Froome (Team Sky).

"The Giro is too hard to arrive fresh for the Tour," said Astana sport director Giuseppe Martinelli. "If anyone can do it, it's Alberto, but it will be very difficult for him. The others will arrive with fresher legs."

DISMANTLING THE ASTANA THREAT

When the Giro started on May 9 along the sun-dappled Italian Riviera, the first half of Contador's Giro-Tour double looked relatively easy. On paper, the Giro course didn't seem to contain many dangers, but that illusion quickly unraveled after a brutal opening week of racing.

*Travis
McCabe*

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"The first week of the Giro has been among the hardest of any grand tour I've ever raced," said Aussie veteran Michael Rogers, one of Contador's key helpers at Tinkoff-Saxo. Ryder Hesjedal (Cannondale-Garmin) quickly found out how hard it was when he was distanced on stage 4 over a relatively easy category 2 climb that Astana attacked with fervor; he lost five minutes and all hopes of reaching the podium. At the start of stage 12, Brett Lancaster (Orica-GreenEdge) said he had already raced 12 hours at maximum threshold, levels that he said he'd only ever seen at the Tour de France.

The Giro also looked "easy," at least for Contador, in terms of rival contenders. The remainder of the "Fab Four" — Froome, Vincenzo Nibali, and defending champion Nairo Quintana — were bypassing the rigors of the Giro. Richie Porte (Sky) would bravely take up the fight, but a crash in stage 13 that came just days after an illegal wheel change in stage 10 (see page 48)

would see the plucky Tasmanian flame out before the mountains. Behind them were Rigoberto Urán (Etixx-Quick-Step), twice runner-up, but he started the Giro with a chest cold, and was never a real threat.

But that was all on paper.

In reality, Contador's hopes of easing through the Giro ran headlong into the collective force of Astana. Backing last year's revelation, Fabio Aru, Astana would quickly prove to be a thorn in Contador's side, attacking him at every moment. The collective force of the turquoise mass outflanked Tinkoff-Saxo, leaving Contador exposed at several key moments late in the Giro, requiring him to use all of his acquired racing acumen to survive.

"Astana made it hard for us," Contador admitted. "I used more energy than I would have liked in this Giro. I will need more time to recover from the efforts."

Just when it looked like Contador was on cruise control, Astana and Katusha ganged up on Contador in the decisive climbing stage to Aprica in stage 16. Coming down a twisting descent, Contador punctured, and the two teams collaborated to charge down the flats toward the base of the Mortirolo, gapping Contador by nearly a minute at the base of the mythic climb. Already firmly in pink thanks to his gains in the time trial, an angry Contador unleashed his fury into the pedals, reeling in a suffering Aru before pulling back the surprise of the 2015 Giro, Mikel Landa.

At 24, Landa came into his own during the Giro, winning two stages and finishing third overall. And he would become the center of polemics throughout the final week as Astana struggled to control the losses to Aru in stages 16 and 18, when Contador turned the screws. Astana put the brakes on Landa over the gravel

PAST AND FUTURE

Both 2012 Giro champion Ryder Hesjedal (bottom) and the young Fabio Aru found their legs in the final week.

road of the Colle delle Finestre on the Giro's penultimate stage when Contador was isolated, and then dropped, in order to help set up Aru for what would be his Giro-saving second consecutive stage victory.

Landa broke down in tears when he was interviewed on Spanish radio, "Sometimes sacrifices have to be made," Landa said. "They told me to stop from the car, when perhaps we should have tried to attack earlier to see how bad Contador was suffering. I would have liked to have continued, but I was following team orders."

Just two days before the decisive time trial in stage 14, Martinelli seemed to read the writing on the wall, and told *Velo*, "Contador is not only hard to beat, but almost impossible. Right now, if we could finish second with Aru, I would take that."

There was intense criticism of Astana's tactics over the final week. Aru was struggling at Madonna di Campiglio and Aprica, and Landa was clearly stronger — perhaps even better than Contador — yet the team was firmly backing its rising star. At 25, Aru is seen as the successor to Nibali's throne, and they're nurturing him to win the Giro in 2016.

But did they let an opportunity slip through their hands to win the race with Landa? Astana sport director Alexander Shefer later defended their strategy to have Landa work for Aru. "Aru was closer to Contador on GC, and he was in position to pose a serious threat," he said.

As it played out, Contador lost 2:25 to Aru at Sestriere because he knew he had dismantled the Astana juggernaut. Winning grand tours isn't just about the legs.

HEART AND HEAD

The way Contador handled the Astana threat — marking Landa up Cervinia in stage 19 and allowing Aru to ride away with the win — revealed just how cagey Contador can be. He could see that Astana was stronger than his Tinkoff-Saxo squad, but could also sense that Landa was going to fall victim to internal team politics despite appearing stronger than Aru. Astana won the final four decisive mountain stages, with Landa at Madonna di Campiglio and Aprica, and Aru at Cervinia and Sestriere, but they couldn't shake Contador.

In fact, shaking Contador is something that no one's been able to do across the arc of his career. He's like a shark when it comes to a leader's jersey; he's never lost one once he's sunk his teeth into it. He did lose the pink jersey for a single day during this Giro when he crashed in stage 13 just outside the safety zone of three kilometers to go, but took it back with authority, and

*Kathryn
Bertone*



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"The more I know Alberto, the more I am excited about him." — OLEG TINKOV

for good, in the time trial the next day.

"Alberto just wants to win. He has an innate ability to set high goals, and work at them. He is really one of a kind," Rogers told *Velo*. "He is the toughest fighter you will ever meet. You can count the people who have come and gone since he has been at the top."

Contador's climbing skills have helped him win seven grand tours (not counting the disqualified 2010 Tour and 2011 Giro), but it was against the clock where he won his second pink jersey. Tinkoff nailed it in the opening day team time trial to take important gains on Astana and Sky, setting Contador up to take the pink jersey in stage 5. Although Vasil Kiryienka (Sky) won the 59.4km time trial in stage 14, Contador was just 14 seconds back in third, taking nearly three minutes on Aru and four minutes on Landa.

"Alberto is very good at measuring his efforts, and using just enough to keep the jersey," De Jongh said. "I've never seen anyone so good at defending a leader's jersey as Contador."

Contador eventually won the Giro by 1:53 over Aru and 3:05 over Landa. His two younger rivals couldn't help but think the master had schooled them. In many ways, that's just what Contador is: a master at his trade. His legendary detail to his bicycle setup, with veteran mechanic Faustino Muñoz, equals his attention to his diet and training. When team boss Oleg Tinkov hung out with Contador this January during a training camp atop the Teide volcano on Tenerife, even the outspoken Russian billionaire was left speechless.

"The more I know Alberto, the more I am excited about him," Tinkov told *Velo*. "I spent 10 days with him, and you see how controlled he is, how concentrated, how he takes care of his body, his diet, and his training. Nothing is free in this life, and when I saw how dedicated he was, back in January, I realized how special Contador really is. He won the Giro because he did the work in January."

Will it be good enough to pull off the double? Contador barely had time to enjoy the Giro victory before he began to feel the pressure building for the Tour.

"My Tour starts now," Contador said as he returned to Spain. "I want to enjoy this Giro, because it wasn't easy, and we will see about the Tour. You never know until you try. We managed the first part of our challenge. Let's arrive to the Tour, and then see how the race unfolds. I am already excited by the challenge."

So, too, are cycling fans across the globe. The same might not be said inside the team buses at Movistar, Sky, and Astana. 

GIRO: BY THE (POWER) NUMBERS

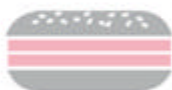
According to Chad Haga's (Giant-Alpecin) data uploaded to **STRAVA**

78,518

KJ

TOTAL KILOJOULES
put through the pedals,
over the course of the
entire race

57



TOTAL ENERGY
put through the pedals,
in In-n-Out cheeseburgers,
"protein style"

117



TOTAL ENERGY
put through the pedals,
in Honey Stinger
Gingersnap Waffles

1,406



WATTS
Maximum power output
from the race (6 watts
higher than power of
Pioneer 12-inch Cham-
pion Series sub-woofers)

451



WATTS
(stage 8 at mile 119.2)
Maximum 5-minute
power output

401



WATTS
(stage 14 TT at mile 39.1)
Maximum 1-hour power
output (enough to
power a desktop com-
puter for one hour)

260



WATTS
(stage 3 at mile 83)
Easiest day for
weighted average
power

MAX



WATTS
(stage 14 ITT)
Hardest day for
weighted average
power



15,748

FT

FEET
(stage 19)
Most elevation
gain in a stage

141,392

FT

FEET
Total elevation gain
throughout the race

4.87



TIMES
Climbed the height of
Mount Everest (29,035
feet)

34.26



TIMES
Climbed the elevation
gain of Mortirolo (4,124
feet)

101:02:31



TIME
Total moving time for
the race

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GREEN STAR RISING

Davide Formolo is the next big thing in Italian cycling **BY CALEY FRETZ**

Davide Formolo stood thin as a bread stick behind the Giro d'Italia podium, his face at least four years younger than the 22 years on his racing license, surrounded by Italian cycling royalty. An embrace from Paolo Bettini, then a handshake from Giro d'Italia boss Mauro Vegni. With a short walk up to RAI's television set, where he would be broadcast into homes across Italy, he stepped into a select group of once and future Italian heroes.

Cannondale-Garmin's young man from Veneto, Italy, who won't turn 23 until October, won the fourth stage of the Giro d'Italia in daring style, escaping from a day-long breakaway on the way to La Spezia to hold off a charging lead group by just over 20 seconds.

It was not a sneaky move, not a slide off the front as others looked away, but a forceful attack. The breakaway did not let him escape; he made their loss compulsory. It was an unquestionable proof of class.

"We know he's good," said Cannondale-Garmin sport director Bingen Fernández. "How far he can go, well, the road is going to put him in his place."

Formolo held on to a top-15 position at the Giro

for nearly two weeks until the inevitable bad day came. He lost eight minutes on the Madonna di Campiglio on stage 16. It was always going to happen.

"They told me less than two weeks before the Giro that I would be here," he said, sitting behind a small table and small coffee on the Giro's first rest day. "So I'm maybe not training like Aru or the other GC riders. Other GC riders, from a week after last year's Giro they are focused, focused on the Giro d'Italia for next year. Not me."

Formolo's English is good, confident, and improving day-by-day throughout the Giro; he roomed with American Nathan Brown. He told his story with a hint of disbelief, still, at how far he's come and how quickly it all happened.

He began riding when he was seven, he said, slowly at first, with his father. His engine was, if anything, too big for junior racing, where he found many top placings but few victories. The races were rarely difficult enough to allow his climbing legs to truly shine.

"When I was young the races were not so hard, but now the races are harder so it's easier for me to be in the front," he said.

"I never won so much, because I don't have a

good sprint. So I needed to drop everyone to win. I was always second, third, third, fourth, third," he said. A laugh, and a slap on his forehead. "For every six second places I won one."

It's a different world for the truly gifted.

His is one of those engines that excels in any endurance sport. He was a good runner, a good swimmer, too, but in the end the choice was easy: "The bike rider is the most beautiful, no?"

His team, at least for now, has not put any pressure on him. The weight of expectation is surely enough.

"It's his first grand tour, the first grand tour for a young kid is different from a guy who is 28. We have to see his limits," Fernandez said. "He's confident, he's good, he's a nice kid. He's a nice boy who 'goes.' As a rider he knows what he wants, he's focused and committed to going after what he wants. With that, he will go far."

Formolo's status as Italy's rising star sets no burden upon his thin shoulders, he said. The weight of expectation seems to slip off as quickly as it can be piled on, deflected by the Teflon of youth and the confidence of talent. How far can he go? The world doesn't know; Davide Formolo doesn't know. His focus, now, is on finding out. **V**

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Never Settle



IMPLOSION

Richie Porte's hopes at the Giro collapsed under the weight of great expectations

BY ANDREW HOOD | JESOLO, ITALY

It all started with so much promise. At the dawn of the 2015 Giro d'Italia, Richie Porte (Team Sky) was a new man. Leaner and fitter than ever before, and coming off the best spring of his career, Porte lined up in Sanremo in early May as Alberto Contador's most dangerous rival.

To understand Porte's rise as a legitimate Giro threat, we must return to last year's Tour de France. After Chris Froome crashed out, Porte was given the opportunity of a lifetime. Backed by the powerful Sky machine, and with Contador also out of the race, Porte was suddenly in a position to take the yellow jersey. But just as quickly, his dreams evaporated in the Alps, and he limped into Paris sick, frustrated, and humiliated, 23rd overall, more than one hour behind Vincenzo Nibali.

Soon after the Tour, Porte went to a Team Sky doctor to identify why he would invariably succumb to the rigors of racing. The experts ran a battery of tests, but the epiphany came when a doctor quietly pulled him aside and said, "Richie, you just don't look like a bike racer."

He meant that Porte was packing some weight. And in today's super-lean peloton, where power-to-weight ratio is the key to grand tour success, the implications were crystal clear. Porte was one of the top riders in the peloton due, in large part, to the gifts that the cycling gods had bestowed upon the 30-year-old Tasmanian; but he finally recognized that he would never be able to realize his full potential unless things changed. And that meant living like a professional cyclist, 24 hours a day.

"I finally made that final step, and sacrificed everything for the bike," Porte said earlier this season. "Until you do that, you will never have a chance in the peloton today."

Over the winter, Porte stayed out of the bars — forfeiting his favorite off-season indulgence of Cooper's Ale — and roared into 2015 a different rider. He was "Froome skinny," and the results poured in. In January, he won the Australian time trial championship and the queen stage at the Santos Tour Down Under. In Europe, he won Paris-Nice, Volta a Catalunya, and the Giro del Trentino in unstoppable succession. Porte was flying high coming into the Giro. He even had the "Richie Mobile," a germ-free, doublewide camper where he could sleep in quiet solitude in the same bed every night. The pink jersey was in his sights.

The first week of the Giro was flawless. Despite Team Sky losing 20 seconds to archrival Tinkoff-Saxo in the opening team time trial, Porte seemed like he was in the comfort zone. He was oozing confidence, and he followed the moves in the opening mountain stages at Abetone and Campitello Matese with ease. All he needed to do was get through a few more transition stages before the arrival of the decisive 59.4km time trial in stage 14.

Then, dramatically and permanently, Porte's fortunes changed in the most unlikely of places. A puncture with 7km to go on the otherwise unremarkable transition stage to Forlì saw Porte's world disintegrate. Desperate to limit his losses against a peloton that was chasing a breakaway at full speed, Porte inexplicably took a wheel change from compatriot Simon Clarke, of the rival Orica-GreenEdge squad. The problem was that Clarke was from another team, and accepting assistance from anyone but your



own team is explicitly banned. The UCI jury handed down a two-minute penalty; in modern cycling, with minimal differences in the GC, the punishment was effectively a death sentence.


But the worst was yet to come. Another crash, another disaster. Caught in a pileup 200 meters from the 3km-to-go "safe zone," Porte landed hard on his knee and hip at the end of stage 13 into Jesolo. He would take a bike from a Sky teammate, but the damage was done. Porte could barely walk, let alone pedal. The crash, just a day before the decisive time trial, was the end of Porte's Giro dreams.

When he lost 27 minutes to Madonna di Campiglio in the Dolomites, it was clear the Giro had won. "Sometimes you're the hammer," Porte muttered, "other times you're the nail."

Porte's dramatic collapse revived the debate about whether the plucky Tasmanian had the chops to challenge for victory in a grand tour. The buzz before the start of the Giro was that the Australian "always has a bad day." Despite Porte's painful exit, the team remained defiant.

"Of course, Richie has the qualities to win a grand tour. You cannot win races like Paris-Nice and Catalunya if you are not a quality rider," said Sky sport director Dario Cioni. "Richie has had bad luck. He came to this Giro in the best shape of his career. He can do it again."

By the time Porte limped out of the Giro, he was vowing to rebuild for the Tour de France. At the Tour, he will slot into a domestique role for Froome, someone familiar with bad luck, but who has also delivered big wins. Aware of the growing doubts about his grand-tour pedigree, Porte is still hopeful.

"It shows how hard it is to win a grand tour," Porte told *Velo*. "You need to be lucky 21 days in a row, don't you? I came in as good a condition as I could, I was motivated as ever, it felt that it was a massive opportunity, but it hasn't worked out." 

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THE HILL OF *windows*

PHOTOS BY BRAKETHROUGH MEDIA



A lone moment of weakness for the maglia rosa. A last chance at redemption for a former Giro d'Italia winner. A fight between two teammates, leader and domestique, that would end in tears.

Gifts, all, of the Colle delle Finestre, the penultimate climb of the penultimate day of the 2015 Giro d'Italia.

On a Saturday in May, the Giro rose nearly 12 miles and 5,500 feet through deep alpine forest and clinging clouds, across quickly switch-backing tarmac, and then rough, sinuous dirt, bringing the Finestre back into the collective conscience of cycling, cementing the climb's place in cycling legend.

The Giro has used the Finestre, literally the "hill of windows," which is topped by five

miles of dirt road through one of the sport's most spectacular natural amphitheatres, twice before. In 2005 it saw a late-race duel between Gilberto Simoni and "il Falco," Paolo Salvodelli. Simoni, the better climber, escaped across the dirt with a small group and Salvodelli, living up to his nickname, was forced to save his maglia rosa with the descent of his life. In 2011, it was Vasil Kiryienka's day to shine as Alberto Contador controlled his GC rivals (the Spaniard would later lose his title after his doping suspension).

The Finestre of 2015 saw a duel between a fading Contador and Astana's bickering young climbers, Fabio Aru and Mikel Landa, animated throughout by frequent, desperate attacks by a Ryder Hesjedal looking to exit the Giro with a result that matched his form.

But the racing, even when gripping, is only half of the Finestre's charm.

More important is the charisma of the surface, that loose dirt left tenuous even after careful preparation days before the race; the amphitheater, lined with thousands of fans who gained access through their own power, barred from driving anywhere near the peak; the weather, which snagged on the barren mountains nearby before releasing like an elastic band onto those who dared flock above treeline; the gruppetto, passing by more than half an hour after the leaders, happy in the knowledge that this climb, difficult as it was, was the highest point of the Giro, the Cima Coppi.

The race was, figuratively speaking, all downhill from here. — CALEY FRETZ




COLLE DELLE FINESTRE

LENGTH 11.5 MILES
(4.8 MILES UNPAVED)

AVERAGE GRADIENT 9.2%

MAXIMUM GRADIENT 14.0%

ELEVATION GAIN 5,500 FEET



DIRTY WORK

The leading duo of Mikel Landa (Astana) and Ilnur Zakarin (Katusha) round the final hairpin of the Finestre with eventual stage winner Fabio Aru (Astana) in hot pursuit.



PAPER JACKET

With weather rolling in, fans hand riders newspaper to stuff down the front of their jerseys for the descent.



AFTER PARTY

The straggling riders turned the Finestre into a party. Adam Hansen has a little fun by snatching a fan's pink wig as he chases him up the final meters of the climb.

THE HEROIC

A group of cyclists paid homage to the riders from decades past, in the style of L'Eroica, by riding the Finestre on vintage single-speed bikes.



FRENCH PHENOMENON

Julian Alaphilippe is the revelation of the 2015 season, and he's just getting started

BY NEAL ROGERS | PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

One can be forgiven for not knowing the name Julian Alaphilippe before the 2015 racing season. But after the revelatory spring campaign he's had, cycling fans can expect to hear quite a bit about the 22-year-old Frenchman in the years to come.

The second-year pro who hails from St-Amand Montrond in the Centre region of France has quickly risen from unknown to unparalleled. He was the revelation of the Ardennes classics, taking seventh at the Amstel Gold Race, second at Flèche Wallonne, and second at Liège-Bastogne-Liège — his first attempt at any of the hilly spring classics. Following the Ardennes, Alaphilippe also finished in the top-three on a pair of stages at the Tour de Romandie. At the Amgen Tour of California, he won the queen stage, wore the leader's jersey, narrowly lost the race lead, and walked away with the best young rider's competition.

The son of an orchestra conductor, Alaphilippe began riding at age 13, stepping away from a childhood spent playing the drums — a hobby he still pursues. "I love music and rhythm," he said. "Like riding, music gives me an outlet for my energy."

Known more as a sprinter during his amateur career, the 5-foot-8, 137-pound Etixx-Quick-Step rider has proven himself to be a capable all-rounder. He first made a name for himself in cyclocross, taking silver at the 2010 junior world championship and bronze at the U23 world cyclocross championship in 2013, as well as a pair of French U23 national titles. He spent a year riding with the French army team before joining Quick-Step's feeder team, the Etixx-Inhed Continental squad, in 2013.

At the 2013 Tour de l'Avenir, riding for the French national team, Alaphilippe won a mountaintop finish on the final stage, finishing ahead of Matej Mohoric (now with Cannondale-Garmin), Adam Yates (now with Orica-GreenEdge), and Toms Skujins, the Hincapie Racing rider who won a stage and led the Amgen Tour of California for three days.

Alaphilippe joined Quick-Step's WorldTour team in 2014, finishing second, third, and fourth in bunch sprints at the Volta a Catalunya before registering his first pro victory at the Tour de l'Ain, attacking from 3km out to win from a select group that included Dan Martin and Romain Bardet. Those results led French national coach Pierre-Yves Chatelon to describe Alaphilippe to L'Equipe as a classics rider in the mold of Peter Sagan, saying, "He is very, very strong technically in 'kamikaze' finishes and on descents."

TIM DE WARE



ALAPHILIPPE AND HENAO

“He just wants to go out and go as hard as he can and win everything he does.” — Mark Cavendish

So perhaps it should have come as little surprise that Alaphilippe ended up contending with Sagan for the overall victory in California. Neither rider was picked as a pre-race favorite — Sergio Henao (Sky) and Robert Gesink (LottoNL-Jumbo) shared that honor — with the climb up Mt. Baldy on stage 7 expected to determine the overall winner.

Asked about how he liked his chances to contend for the GC, Alaphilippe, who was doing double duty in California as part of Mark Cavendish's leadout train, couldn't begin to guess. “It's my first time doing an eight-stage race, with mountains and a time trial, so I am just looking day after day,” Alaphilippe said. “I'll do my best. There are a lot of good riders here. I'll do my best to follow the best guys.”

When the stage 6 time trial was moved from Big Bear Lake to Magic Mountain, and shortened from 15 down to 6 miles, the door opened for more explosive riders to stay within reach of pure climbers on the classification. Sagan won the short, technical TT, but Alaphilippe finished third on the stage, 19 seconds back, and ahead of the climbing specialists. Time bonuses that Sagan accrued throughout the week put him 45 seconds up on Alaphilippe, and everything was up in the air on Baldy.

Alaphilippe showed his class by responding to Henao's acceleration at 4km to go with a winning counterattack, while further back, Sagan muscled his way up Mt. Baldy, pedaling at a drastically slower cadence than the much

lighter climbers. And though he suffered, the Slovakian champion never gave up the chase, sprinting across the line and collapsing at the finish. He ceded his GC lead to Alaphilippe by just two seconds.

With bonus time on offer on the final stage — at one intermediate sprint as well as at the finish line — the entire eight-stage race came down to bonus seconds. And while Alaphilippe did his best, finishing third in the intermediate sprint behind Cavendish and Sagan, in the end, it proved an impossible task. Sagan was the next-best sprinter in the field, and though he barely managed to finish third at the line in Pasadena, in a photo finish with Tyler Farrar (MTN-Qhubeka), he'd done just enough to take four seconds of bonus time, delivering the Amgen Tour its most thrilling finale in 10 editions, the winning margin no more than a centimeter. (If one were to tally all of the bonus seconds earned by Sagan and Alaphilippe over eight stages, however, the French rider actually covered the 707 miles faster — Sagan earned a total of 32 bonus seconds over the week, while Alaphilippe earned just one.)

After the race, Cavendish told *Velo* that he'd been repeatedly impressed with the young French phenom. “He's a good kid, he's still so young. And to be fair, he didn't have the best winter — he had a knee problem and he came back really lean. He went really well at the Ardennes, you saw that second at Liège to Valverde.



SAGAN

But to be honest, I didn't know how he'd go in the big cols; I'd never seen him do them before, and he was pretty phenomenal, actually. As well as that talent, he's got this winner's mentality. On and off the bike he's good with the people around him and he goes out with this ‘fuck the world’ mentality, kind of like I had, and he just wants to go out and go as hard as he can and win everything he does, and it's super nice to see that in a young guy.”

In the end, Alaphilippe left California with a stage win, second overall, and the best young rider's jersey. But more importantly, he left California with the confidence that he can climb with some of the best in the sport, and that he can contend for the overall win at a weeklong race. He'll start his first grand tour, the Vuelta a España, in August, with a start at the Tour de France in 2016 firmly in his sights.

In the race to become the first French Tour champion since Bernard Hinault took victory in 1985, other young, touted French riders such as Bardet, Thibaut Pinot, and Warren Barguil should take note — Alaphilippe is coming, and he's not afraid. ✓

CASEY B. GIBSON; DOUG PENNINGER/GETTY IMAGES (2)

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American absence

For the first time in history, no American rider finished on the podium at the Tour of California

When the first Amgen Tour of California was held in 2006, the final podium was filled with Americans — Floyd Landis, Dave Zabriskie, and Bobby Julich. The following year, German Jens Voigt finished second to Levi Leipheimer — the first of Leipheimer's three consecutive wins — with American Jason McCartney in third. Australian Michael Rogers became the first non-American to win the Amgen Tour in 2010, with Zabriskie and Leipheimer joining him on the podium.

Strong performances by foreign riders bring the race international credibility, yet this year, for the first time in history, no American stood on the final podium. Instead, a Slovakian, Frenchman, and Colombian took top honors; Joe Dombrowski (Cannondale-Garmin) was the highest placed American, in fourth overall. It was the second year in a row that a foreigner had won the race, and the only edition without an American stage winner, begging the question — where are the Americans?

It's a simple question, with a complicated answer.

Tejay van Garderen (BMC Racing), the last American to win, has not returned to California since 2013, preferring to take a break in racing in May as he builds toward the Tour de France. The Airgas-Safeway Continental team of Chris Horner, the overall winner in 2011, was not invited to this year's race. Andrew Talansky (Cannondale-Garmin), a rider capable of winning the overall, exited the race on the first stage due to a respiratory infection brought on by seasonal allergies. And Peter Stetina (BMC Racing) saw his dream of fighting for the California podium disappear when he shattered his patella Vuelta al Pais Vasco in April.

Giant-Alpecin's Lawson Craddock finished third overall in California in 2014, behind Bradley Wiggins and Rohan Dennis, but a disastrous crash at the Tour Down Under scuttled his early season race schedule. Though he returned to California with an eye on a high finish in the classification, Craddock faded on Mt. Baldy and finished 28th overall.

"It's a good race for me, but I think after my crash at the Tour Down Under, I was a bit too optimistic to go in thinking I'd be able to ride at peak fitness," Craddock told *Velo*. "Taking three weeks off in January, it's like having an off season at the beginning of the year; it made it tough to be 100 percent. I accepted the leadership role, and I had a feeling for how it was to be the leader on the team, and in that aspect it was really good, but the legs weren't there when I needed them."

Dombrowski, whose breakthrough ride came on Baldy in 2012, finished fourth on the climb, and fourth overall. That 2012 ride helped him land a two-year deal with Sky; however, he lost much of those two seasons due to a weakness in his left leg that was ultimately diagnosed as iliac artery endofibrosis. Dombrowski had surgery in August, and spent the second half of the 2014 season recovering.

Though he raced the Amgen Tour last year in support of Wiggins, this year was to be Dombrowski's first attempt at a GC result in California since his 2012 breakthrough. He arrived in Sacramento proclaiming he was "fit and fast," but picked up what he believes to be the same virus that forced Talansky to withdraw on the first stage.

"Overall, my performance was, I think, good," Dombrowski said. "Looking at it in the broader picture, it was successful in some regard, because coming off the last few years, with my health problems, putting together a real GC result is a step in the right direction for me. I wouldn't say I went out and smashed it."

For American fans, the most encouraging performance on Baldy belonged to Sky's Ian Boswell. After riding in support of teammate Sergio Henao, Boswell finished third on Mt. Baldy. Though he didn't give it everything in the stage 6 time trial at Magic Mountain, Boswell's ride on Baldy netted him a seventh overall finish.

Boswell, in his third season with Sky, said the

British team allowed him to focus on the GC at California, though plans changed as the race grew closer. Eventually, Henao became the leader.

On Baldy, Boswell was the last man standing for Henao, driving the pace before the Colombian launched an attack with 5km to go that only Julian Alaphilippe (Etixx-Quick-Step) could match.

"Everything went to plan, and the team did such a good job all day; I'd hardly done any work when we got to the final climb," Boswell said. "I had good legs that day, and since Alaphilippe dropped Sergio, there was incentive for me to get back and help any way I could, and it turned into a result as well, which was nice to get."

Boswell and Dombrowski are but two of several long, lanky climbers expected by Americans to be gunning for the GC podium in California in years to come. Phil Gaimon (Optum) and Carter Jones (Giant-Alpecin) finished in the top 20, while Canadian Rob Britton (SmartStop) was the top domestic rider, in 10th overall.

"Lawson is probably the most complete rider," Jones said of the up-and-coming crop of American GC riders. "He has the most upside on his climbing, in terms of improvement, and he is the best TT rider. In terms of the GC, he is the most well-rounded. Joe Dombrowski has the most pure, natural talent. He's an absolute conundrum; as a pure climber, he's pretty special. Ian Boswell is very talented. He's been in the World-Tour for three years now, and he's going to come around and show everyone what he has. We saw a glimpse of that in California."

Like Alaphilippe, several American GC riders are hoping to be selected to race the Vuelta in August, including Dombrowski, Boswell, Craddock, and Jones.

For the Americans, the Amgen Tour will remain a major objective, and a future grand tour contender may rise from the slopes of the Sierras in the years to come. — NEAL ROGERS



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INTO THE LIGHT

Chuck Teixeira gently weaves his way up Kiler Canyon near Paso Robles, California, atop his vintage Teledyne Titan (see page 64).

BY CHRIS CASE



The Heroic

Eroica California brings the golden age
of Italian cycling to the Pacific shores
of modern America



The light was flickering like an antique cinema projector, hazy shafts of sun casting down upon the dirt double track, through the thick canopy of a hollow, secluded canyon.

Light. Shadow. Light. Shadow. Flick, flick, flick.

If you squinted in the noontime light you might see Coppi, climbing, crouched into a coil of potential energy, his long nose guiding him like an unstoppable ship, right there beside you.

A gaggle of riders wearing weathered wool and turning slow revolutions with their slim cranks were climbing through Cypress Canyon — far from Gaiole in Chianti, or the Strade Bianche, the birthplace of the original L'Eroica — inside this perforated tunnel of trees near California's Central Coast.

This was Eroica California: part Italy, part America, a Civil War reenactment for cycling, brought to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

Rebirth of a golden era

In Italy, before the advent of television, the story of sports was a fantastical drama played out daily in newspapers. Like so many, young Giancarlo Brocci was fascinated. He devoured the drama, read the epic tales. In Gaiole, he learned to read even before starting elementary school, but was surrounded by older people in the village who couldn't read at all.

Young Brocci would go to the sports park on Monday morning to read of the weekend's action in the newspapers. The little boy would read about the races to the folks much older than him. It was the late 1950s, and the stories he read meant one thing: the most passionate rivalry in the history of the sport, between two men, gods, champions — Coppi and Bartali.

Flash forward three decades and Brocci, now a doctor by training, still living in and in love with his hometown of Gaiole, wanted to do something for the sport he loved in the place he cherished. There was a movement afloat by certain city councils to start paving the famed strade bianche. Brocci set out to draw attention to these roads in order to help preserve them.

The original event in Italy, L'Eroica, born in 1997, has since evolved (the events outside of Gaiole, of which there are now four, one each in California, Japan, England, and Spain, all go by the title Eroica, and the original remains L'Eroica, or "The Heroic"). While modern bikes were once allowed and the competitive element consisted of the best outfit for those who participated with a historical bike and clothing, now it is closed to everything but vintage racing bikes built prior to 1987.



"It's not just about dressing up, it's about really reshaping the beauty of fatigue and the sense and feeling of accomplishing something at the end."

— GIANCARLO BROCCI

What is most important though, is the pure effort involved in the ride, "the beauty of fatigue and the taste of accomplishment," as Brocci puts it.

"A lot of people that come, and the people who get to know about the event in Italy and have not taken part in it, a lot of times they have the impression that this event is more like a lifestyle event where people like to dress up. But it's really about understanding the roots of cycling by using the vintage bike that allows you to understand how hard it is to climb the hill or to do 80 kilometers, or 130, or 200. The challenge aspect of Eroica is very important," Brocci said. "That's why here [in California], they decided to do this 127-mile route. Because it's not just about dressing up, it's about really reshaping the beauty of fatigue and the sense and feeling of accomplishing something at the end. Which is really important. Even if it's not competitive, it's still competitive for oneself. Because you challenge yourself in doing something so long and difficult with these kind of bikes."

Be prepared

Find yourself a bike, and be sure it was made before 1987, complete with down-tube shifters, toe clips, and external cable routing into the hoods. Find yourself a jersey, make sure it's wool, and preferably plastered with an Italian surname. Get your black shorts, your bright white socks, and a "hairnet" helmet if you can. You're ready for Eroica. For period-correct footwear, there are a few options to choose from, assuming you don't have 25-year-old shoes decaying in your closet. (Check out Vittoria's Line 1976 — Italian-made leather which are Eroica-ready both because of the yesteryear styling and the out-of-the-box comfort.)

The bikes harken back to an era of racing that predates the birth of any professional WorldTour rider today; authentic to the epoch, many were running tubulars that were narrow (22mm),



gearing that was constrained (53-42 in front, a five- or six-speed, 12-22 cassette in the rear), and braking that was rather grim.

It was time to conjure the spirit of Coppi and Bartali, Geminiani and Merckx.

Riders set off in the champagne air of a Paso Robles morning, perched upon antique steel before the sun had a chance to rise. If you squinted, you could take yourself back to another time, the darkness aiding in the imagining of a bygone bicycling script. Hunched, rocking bodies atop clicking-clacking machines. Old cables, friction shifters, cold fingers. The hypnotic silhouettes of symmetric, contouring combs of vines.

If you wanted to be in Italy, you were.

By sunrise, the lead riders had reached the first checkpoint amid the olive trees of Olea Farm — if you were heroic enough to take on

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PACIFIC PARADISE

After cresting Cypress Mountain, riders were treated to majestic views of the Pacific Ocean as they careened down 13 miles of sinuous road to the town of Cambria.

the 127-mile route, it was the first of five checkpoints where riders received a stamp confirming their arrival. Breakfast would be nothing other than Belgian fries cooked in luscious olive oil, sprinkled with Himalayan salt. Ketchup and salsa for your pleasure. Big bowls of olive oil and spices lined long tables beside sliced baguettes.

It was a glorious day for a really long ride. Until it wasn't. Pfft, pfft, pfft. Air, under pressure, evacuating through a tiny hole, intermittently interrupted by the revolutions of the wheel.

This was a ride on which technologies that had long since lost the lead pack were suddenly on the sharp end of the peloton again. This was equipment familiar to a generation who rode "sew-ups" to train on. Puncturing a tubular far from anywhere is a requirement for understanding the spirit of L'Eroica, a ride back through time, when hard was harder and long was longer.

Bring a friend along for the moral support. It isn't that changing a tubular on the side of the road is difficult, but there is comfort in having someone who has done it hundreds of times beside you, if only to convince you that riding for another 90 miles isn't suicidal.

No glue? Use that rear brake to heat up the rim, melt some fumes, and get one percent more adhesion through the magic of thermal dynamics.

There were souls scattered about the course, some who had resisted the temptation to go all-in on archaic equipment, opting instead for the safety of clinchers. Then there were others in various states of glueless paranoia. Some had their front tires cozily bonded while their shoddy rear spares, complete with cuts in the sidewall and tumors beneath the tread, merely lounged around on a whirling hoop, ready and

waiting to drift off. Or vice versa.

The roads eventually led to another checkpoint in a burgundy colored barn, amid the forest on the lower slopes of Cypress Mountain. From here, the route headed over the Coast Range on a rustic dirt road, complete with 20 percent grades, and, ultimately, paradisiac views of the Pacific Ocean.

But paradise would have to wait for some. Tubular eruptions were taking place, scattered about the forest. While riders sat there in the sun, peeling another tubular off and tossing another on, the flies buzzing and the soil parched, absorbing the scenery and the circumstances, it was easy to drift back to another time, to bike racers from long ago: Eugène Christophe and the Pyrenean blacksmith shop, forging forks to ride on; the absurd number of miles and the frequency of mechanical misadventures that defined the early years of racing.

If you were all alone, you need only figure it out and ride on. This was a bike ride — a long, hard bike ride. It felt a little like an old movie, the grainy flickering strobe of black and white, sped up to an inaccurate timbre.

Heritage of hard

It used to be that professional cycling was an even harder endeavor than it is today. The longest Tour de France stage was a staggering 482 kilometers, held in 1919 between Les Sables and Bayonne. Dirt, gravel, and other less seemly surfaces were regular components of races, including the grand tours.

Perhaps the sport lost some of its swagger in the 1990s and 2000s. But there has been a resurgence within professional cycling, thanks in no small part to Brocci's efforts to revive this golden era of cycling and the conditions and terrain in which the fabled heroes of the '50s and '60s raced.

Andy Hampsten attended Eroica California. Many former professionals from the 1970s and 1980s came to revive their pasts, feel the pain, reminisce, and be challenged again.


People need something epic, said Brocci, like that epic stage in the 1988 Giro when Hampsten braved the blizzard over the Passo Gavia to finish second and take the overall lead. It was a day full of snow, far eclipsing the dusting seen on the Passo dello Stelvio at last year's Giro in which Nairo Quintana took victory.

In recent years, RCS Sport, organizers of the Giro, have introduced gravel and dirt back into the professional scene. They want to give the world something to see. From the sinister ascent of the stem-biting steep slopes of Plan de Corones on dirt in 2008, to the chaos in Montalcino in 2010, on the strade bianche used at L'Eroica — a day in which world champion Cadel Evans turned his crisp clean white world champ's kit brown with mud — to the infamous dirt of the Colle delle Finestre in 2015, the Giro has brought about a return to this heritage of hard. And it's spreading.

"The Tour de France doesn't really have the dirt roads, but they threw in that beautiful cobbled stage and it rained; oh dear, skittish bike [handlers] didn't do so well and Nibali just nailed it. I loved watching it," Hampsten said. "And the big promoters realized that the public really wants the human story. It's great if there's a giant mountain if something happens, but cycling is about the human story. Throwing in the gravel, it really affects the entire sport and I think makes it more interesting, not just for that particular race, but it gets the Tour de France thinking about how they can make their race more interesting, too."

Eroica is undoubtedly difficult and beautiful; nostalgia for a bygone era brings out the best in people, and affords them the opportunity to go farther again, or allows someone too young to experience it firsthand a glimpse into Coppi's world.

It is machines meeting scenery, man against terrain. It is Italy, but in an American gift basket.

"It's not a sport, but it's a lifestyle. Cycling is a lifestyle," said Michele Pescini, the mayor of Gaiole in Chianti. "And it's a style of the land, the territory — it's a method of transmitting your land and your culture into the world." 

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KENDA

Gray magic

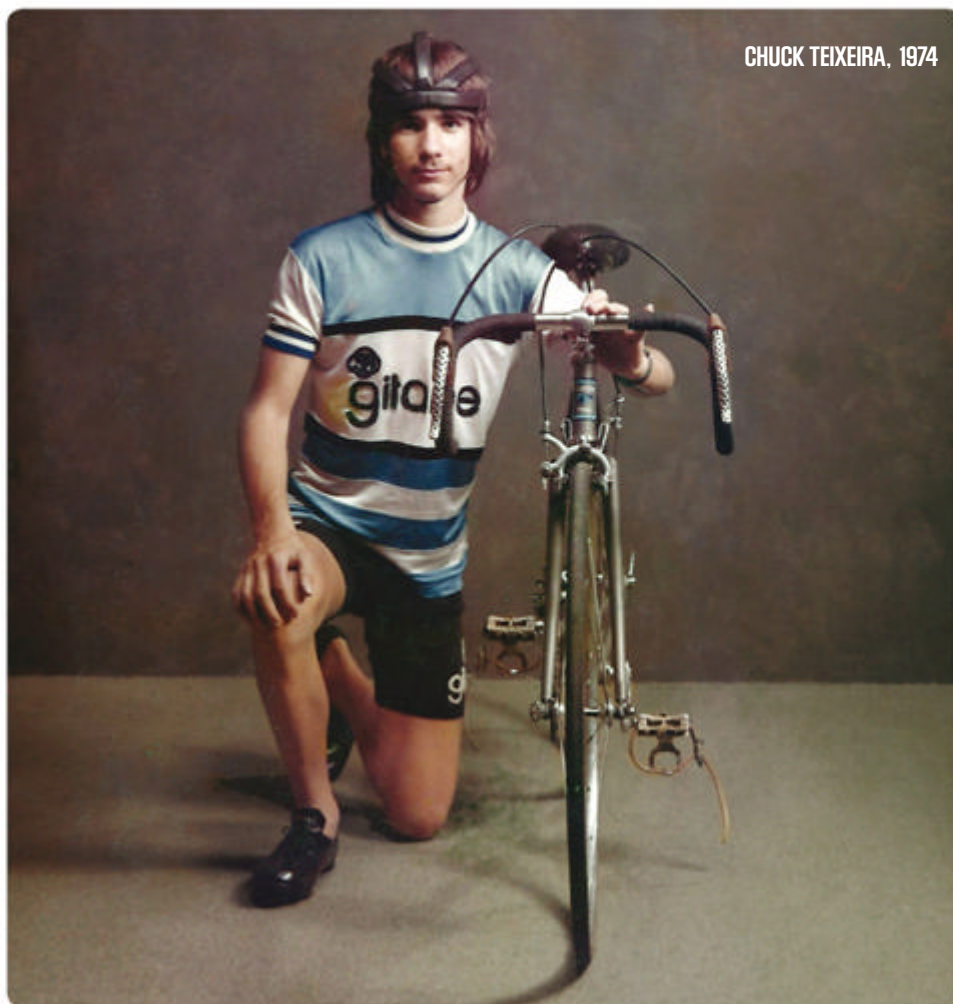
On Easter Sunday of 1976, on a group ride in Hawaii, I had just finished a long pull and was accelerating to latch onto the back of the group; they suddenly slowed. I grabbed my brakes hard, pitching up in a near vertical nose wheelie, but somehow had the reflexes to release the brakes. I slammed back down on my Zeus sewup rear wheel, which exploded into seven pieces. I fell over on my side, still tightly strapped in my pedals. I was unhurt but my Teledyne Titan was destroyed. The force had bent the down tube, and the rear derailleur and solid titanium dropout were smashed into my 13-17, five-speed gear cluster. I loved that bike; it was magic.

I won my first race on that bike and now it was gone — nobody was fixing titanium frames in 1976. I had spent endless hours drilling out every little part to make an already light bike even lighter. I bought it used, but the frame still cost me \$350 in 1974. A few years later I bought another one, hoping to find the magic again, but it was tired and soon cracked.

Then one day in 2010 I found a Teledyne on eBay; I took a chance. I quickly swapped out many of the standard parts and attempted to set it up just like the one I had in '76. I call it my “total recall bike” because nearly everything on it should have been recalled because it was sure to fail. A 100 percent titanium frame, fork, and chain. Hi-E rims weighing 210 grams apiece and a heavy dose of drillium; 16 pounds, in all its flexy, sketchy 1970s glory. I'm not sure why I was originally drawn to the Teledyne. Sure, it's light, but the grey finish was kind of plain and ugly compared to the stylish Italian bikes of that time.

Most of the time my Teledyne hangs from a hook in my garage. I only take it out for special occasions, or when I just want to feel like a kid again. And so it was for Eroica California. Finally I could do an organized ride that only allowed vintage bikes. And it wasn't a sissy ride; it was a hilly, dirt-infested 200-kilometer route. For years I knew about L'Eroica in Italy, but somehow I never got my act together to make the trip. Now was my chance.

Sunday morning I awoke at 4 a.m., no alarm needed. In the dark I slipped on my vintage Teledyne North Hollywood Wheelmen jersey, gloves,



CHUCK TEIXEIRA, 1974

and hairnet helmet that I had used back in the day. I positioned myself in the front row, set my Garmin, and hid it in my pocket. Nothing modern except my lights should show, I thought; I've got to stay true to the era. At 5 a.m. we rolled out and comfortably cruised along the dark streets of Paso Robles, chatting and checking out each other's old bikes. A guy next to me on a 753 Team Raleigh said, jokingly, “I'm staying away from that guy; his bike is going to break.” Not today, I replied.

It wasn't long before we hit our first rutted dirt section. I very quickly remembered how hard it was to shift one-handed over bumps in the dark. It's things like this that put a smile on my face. The next section of dirt was graded smooth but instantly went straight up hill. It wasn't long before my vintage legs and 42x22 low gear became a problem. I did all I could to keep moving but it was just too hard and I had to stop; 15 miles in and I'm walking. This day is going to suck, I thought.

We soon regrouped and rode on through beautiful oak-covered hills to our next checkpoint. It was like nothing I have ever seen. The cook quickly whipped up some Belgian fries and we dipped them in some fantastic homemade sauces.

We transitioned onto a private, heavily rutted dirt road that was sheltered by a thick canopy of

trees. Most of it was uphill, but the beauty distracted me from the pain in my legs. On the descent, my new riding buddy Chris suffered his second flat. I handed him my spare and left him to change it out himself. I would ride less than a half-mile before I would also flat. I knew Chris would have to ride by so I stripped my bike and waited to repossess my spare. Cold blooded, I know. Sorry buddy.

The next climb was Cypress Mountain, two miles of pavement, with sections as steep as 20 percent. Never have I turned the pedals over so slowly. I read the entry form so I knew I should have used lower gears, but in my mind it wasn't heroic if you didn't use what you used back in the day.

Another stamp in the book in Cambria, some tasty pastries for the pockets, then south to the coast and Cayucos. I made one final stop at a winery for red fuel, and then it was off to the finish. I was smiling ear to ear as I rode under the finishing banner. Afterward, I spent hours in the food tent swapping stories with my new “heroic” friends. And there were plenty after 136 miles and some 11,000 feet of climbing, all on my magic 41-year-old Teledyne. — CHUCK TEIXEIRA

Chuck Teixeira, 55, is a principal engineer and creative specialist at Specialized.

COURTESY CHUCK TEIXEIRA



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STAR SPANGLED

BY DAN WUORI

IN CHATTANOOGA



KRISTIN ARMSTRONG

Kristin Armstrong was in no mood to talk. With only minutes until her do-or-die comeback ride at the USA Cycling professional time trial championship, the two-time Olympic gold medalist had only one thing to say to the journalists lurking nearby.

"Not now."

For Armstrong, the 19.2-mile time-trial course on the outskirts of Chattanooga, Tennessee, meant everything. If the 41-year-old could emerge from retirement to best the domestic peloton, she would not only walk away with her fourth national time trial title, but also lock in the final ticket to September's UCI world championships in Richmond, Virginia. Walk away with anything less and Armstrong's dream of competing at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, could be over before it began.

Less than an hour later, a very different Armstrong returned to the team staging area. Wandering to a neighboring tent to introduce herself to Cannondale-Garmin's Andrew Talansky, the Boise, Idaho, native cracked a smile when asked how she'd done.

"New course record," came her almost casual response.

Armstrong's ride of 42:08 was a statement to the world — and to USA Cycling, in particular. Having been selected, and then publicly unselected, by the governing body to represent the nation at May's Pan American Road Championships in León, Mexico, the rider had come to Chattanooga with something to prove. And that was before she picked up her starting number: 41. Among 43 riders in the field, the two-time world champion — arguably the sport's biggest American star — was assigned to start third, nearly two hours before teammate Carmen Small.

"I thought it was a joke," Armstrong explained of her placement among the field's lesser-known participants.

Three years after she sat in the London Olympics "hot seat" — which happened to be a throne — Armstrong now sat nervously awaiting the results of the field in a slightly less royal position. Perched on a curb in a sweltering Tennessee parking lot, the Twenty16-ShoAir rider couldn't help but shake her head.

"Nobody can say the Chattanooga 'hot seat' isn't hot," she said.

Ninety anxious minutes later, Armstrong was again pulling on the stars and stripes jersey of the national champion, having bested Small and

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ANDREW TALANSKY



Amber Neben (Visit Dallas Cycling) en route to a decisive win.

Reflecting on the importance of the day, Armstrong explained her intensity.

"Personally, there was a need to win. [Today] was a very high priority," she explained after the race. "Carmen [Small] and Evelyn [Stevens] already had spots for Richmond, so if either of them won I knew I'd still have a chance [to make the team as a coaches' selection]. But I knew that the route I really wanted to take was to get an 'automatic' so [my participation at worlds] wouldn't become a question of discretion."

Asked about her difficult road to Richmond, Armstrong made clear her frustration with USA Cycling, which initially selected her for the Pan Am games (which would have provided the rider a second shot at qualification for worlds) before naming Velocio-SRAM's Tayler Wiles under a previously published set of criteria.

"I saw an opportunity to participate at Pan Am through the criteria that were published by USA Cycling," Armstrong said. "And when I saw that I qualified under those criteria, I decided to put my name in to be selected. Then the criteria changed. They reposted the old criteria and I was not qualified any longer."

For Armstrong, the issue was one of fairness.

"The last thing I wanted was anything handed to me," she said. "I didn't want any favors. But I'm going to tell you that I know the process to get into important races. I can recite the criteria. So I'm really happy that I was able to come to Chattanooga and show — on my own, on the road, and with my team and husband fully behind me — that I could do it without being selected as a discretionary [choice]."

For now, the rider's eyes are set squarely on Richmond, where a strong performance could propel her to the Summer Games in Rio.

"Everyone always asks me, 'What's next?' And this might sound strange or funny but

I didn't even know what was next today until [the race was over]," Armstrong said. "I'm just really happy it worked out."

AN AMERICAN (TT CHAMPION) IN PARIS

Coming off a three-year retirement, Armstrong's form was unknown coming into nationals. But, then, so was Andrew Talansky's.

Only weeks before his arrival in Chattanooga, the Cannondale-Garmin GC leader had been forced to abandon the Amgen Tour of California due to a respiratory infection, widely misattributed to allergies.

"It wasn't just an allergy attack from a case of pollen," Talansky told *Velo* of his surprise stage 1 withdrawal. "I just couldn't continue. I made the decision out on the road that I wasn't doing anyone any good even trying to make it through the rest of the stage."

After several days in bed, he began feeling like his old self. But how he would fare in Chattanooga remained something of a mystery, even to him. Just before he took the day's time trial start, he downplayed expectations, admitting he was mostly recovered, but questionable in his fitness.

"I wouldn't say that I'm at 100 percent, but I would say I'm 90 percent of the way back. And I don't mean 90 percent full fitness, I just mean 90 percent of my health," he said.

As it turned out, his fitness was just fine. Talansky rode the course in 38:48, edging his Cannondale-Garmin teammate Ben King and David Williams (Jamis-Hagens Berman) to capture his first professional time trial championship. (Talansky won the U23 competition in 2010.)

After the race, Talansky — who plans to debut his national champion's skinsuit at the Critérium du Dauphiné before flying the flag in the prologue of the Tour de France — ranked the win among the most special of his career, right alongside his Dauphiné GC win in 2014.

"It's totally different emotions," he said of the two races. "I love time trials because it's you against the clock, and everything is under your control. I'm very proud of it. Winning the Dauphiné was a totally different experience. It was my first WorldTour stage race win. But together, this and the Dauphiné are definitely the two highlights of my career thus far. I'm very proud of both."

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

As the pre-race press conference wound down, local television reporters clamored for an opportunity to put the nation's biggest names in front of their cameras. But no invitation was extended to 30-year-old Megan Guarnier.

"It's alright," she told *Velo* when asked about the oversight. "I didn't get into this to be on camera."

The 2012 U.S. road champion maintains an oddly low profile within the country of her birth — perhaps because she spends so little time here. After capturing her first national championship as a member of Team Tibco, Guarnier accepted an invitation to join the Rabo-Liv women's team as its sole American. After a year of riding in support of the sport's biggest international star, Marianne Vos, Guarnier signed with the Dutch Boels-Dolmans squad in 2014, where she stepped into the spotlight on her own. Earlier this year, Guarnier took the biggest win of her career, winning the inaugural women's Strade Bianche.

The chance to return to Europe with a beloved stars-and-stripes jersey upon her shoulders eluded Guarnier in recent years; she's been forced to ride nationals as a team of one. But all that changed in 2015, when American powerhouse Evelyn Stevens raced alongside her.

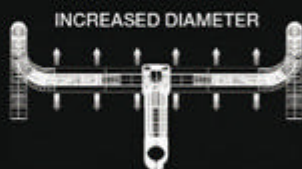
On the roads of Chattanooga, the addition of Stevens proved crucial. The 32-year-old attacked the field in the final miles of the 69-mile road race, a solo breakaway that wasn't quite enough to take the day, but was more than enough to position teammate Guarnier for a successful sprint finish over UnitedHealthcare's Coryn Rivera and Velocio-SRAM's Tayler Wiles.

After the race, Guarnier said her teammate's remarkable ride really piled on the pressure.

"You've seen it the past two years, where somebody can go solo," Guarnier said of Stevens' audacious attack. "If Amber or Tayler had hesitated one bit [in their pursuit], I think Evie would have been gone. It was a really good move. This year it didn't work out for a solo finish like the past years, but it really could have worked. When it didn't, it was a little bit nerve-racking for me, because then I really felt the pressure to finish."

And finish she did, with a perfect bike throw that proved just enough to edge sprinting ace Rivera.

"It's an honor to be able to wear the stars and



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DOUBLE TROUBLE

Though Evelyn Stevens didn't win the national title, her efforts helped set up her teammate Megan Guarnier (right) for the victory.



MATTHEW BUSCHE
AND ALEX HOWES

stripes over in Europe," she continued. "Every time I'm over there it's an honor to represent the United States, but to wear the jersey over there is really something. Hopefully it will raise my game even more."

Now, she may just need to get used to the camera.

FREELANCING

Guarnier wasn't the only past champion looking to reclaim the U.S. road title, nor the only European-based pro forced to adapt to the pressures of riding solo at nationals. Trek Factory Racing's Matthew Busche, who last wore the stars and stripes in 2011, has likewise grown accustomed to freelancing within the national championship race.

So when Cannondale-Garmin's Talansky disappeared from the pack, riding much of the 2015 men's road race off the front, Busche thought his chance had slipped past.

"When that break went, I thought it was over," the 30-year-old Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, native admitted. "I was really upset that I'd missed it."

But the veteran pro knew that if he had a chance, it would take plenty of patience. Characterizing a solo effort to chase down Talansky as a certain "suicide mission," Busche patiently waited for the chase to organize.

"In a group like that, you have to understand that if Andrew stays away then nobody else is going to win, so you might need to burn a couple matches to pull him back," Busche said.

That's just what happened. When the chase swallowed Talansky on the penultimate climb of Chattanooga's Kent Street, the race was on for an elite group that included Busche, Chris Horner (Aircas-Safeway), Kiel Reijnen (UnitedHealthcare), and Phil Gaimon (Optum), among others.



KIEL REIJNEN

As the leaders came through downtown with one lap to go, tragedy struck Reijnen, who flattened; his dreams of a national title sped out of sight. His face contorted into a grimace as he received a wheel change, and then gave chase.

A battle between Busche and Cannondale-Garmin Joe Dombrowski played out over the final kilometer, with Busche ultimately managing to drop the 24-year-old to claim his second title, solo.

But it was the third place finish that really wowed the crowd, when barreling into the finishing straight — in what can only be called one of the race's most inexplicable comebacks — came Reijnen, with tears of anguish pouring down his face.


After the race, Reijnen, now a four-time podium finisher, took no satisfaction in the day, despite his miraculous comeback.

"Coming into the final lap I thought I was

going for the win," he explained. "I think it was a combination of motivation and adrenaline [that allowed me to catch back on]. That combined with the fact that during the last lap there's a lot of tactical fighting and 'cat and mouse.'"

After the race, Busche and Dombrowski discussed the unique nature of the national championship.

"A podium's great, but everyone wants a stars-and-stripes jersey for a year," Dombrowski explained. "Sometimes you go to a stage race and you know you can't win GC, but maybe you can place third. In a one-day race like nationals, you kind of just throw everything out there. There's a lot on the line. Everyone races for the win. Nothing else."

Busche concurred: "It's different from any other race because it's one day, one winner, and even if you're racing with your teammates, there's only one stars-and-stripes jersey..." 

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POWER PLAY

You might think that power is everything when it comes to finishing fast, but positioning is a big part of the game *By Trevor Connor*



Ten years ago, I had the opportunity to talk with the top sprinter in North America. I couldn't resist asking the question that most of us want to know: "What's the secret to winning field sprints?" I got an answer that only a pure sprinter could give: "You have to take that final corner in a way that there's a 50 percent chance you'll win and a 50 percent chance you'll end up in the hospital... and not care which."

I decided I wasn't a sprinter.

When we think of top sprinters, the expression "power monsters" comes to mind. World-Tour fast men can break 1,600 watts seated, and track riders can exceed 2,000 watts.

The problem is you might just be born a sprinter. Or not. "Just how many raw watts you can put out is very genetic," said Optum's Eric Young, a two-time national champion and recent winner of the Tour of the Gila sprinter's jersey.

We can improve upon our sprinting prowess a bit, but Young said that whether sprinters train the skill or not, they are still going to be faster than non-sprinters.

And for those of us who consider a kid on a tricycle to be competition, it gets drearier. Most elite cycling races end in sprint finishes, and multiple studies have found that power is the only good predictor of performance in the last 200 meters.

So, what do you do if you can't finish with a burst of 1,600-watt power?

Fortunately, top sprinters can't seem to output such high numbers either after a long day in the saddle. In a recent study of a WorldTour sprint, the winner peaked at 1,097 watts.

"On stage 3 at Gila, I only hit 1,200 [watts] in that sprint and that's not anywhere close to my max," Young said. "You've been going so hard for 20 seconds already."

Another study analyzed the performance of an anonymous sprinter who won 60 percent of the grand tour sprint stages between 2008 and 2011. The study found only two things that could be used to predict his wins: his position and the number of teammates he had left.

His speed in the final kilometer made no difference.

"Positioning...I would say that [is most important] above everything else," Young said.

But how can position and teammates trump power in a sprint? When we read about those huge numbers in elite sprints, we're usually reading about track racers. In a one-kilometer race, accelerating the rider in the first 12 seconds makes up 73 percent of power demands. That's when they hit those huge numbers. For the remaining 50 seconds, aerodynamic drag dominates, accounting for 74 percent of the work.

In a road race, the field has already sped up for the finale. And if the sprinter has teammates, they will handle much of the aerodynamic drag and even aid in the final acceleration. In other words, the huge wattages aren't needed.

This is why in virtually every race our anonymous rider won he had at least one teammate left with 15 seconds to go.

He also never won if he was outside second to eighth place at 60 seconds to go. He came into

the finale as the fifth or sixth wheel for the majority of his wins.

"A lot of people focus on the actual sprint and coming around whatever guy," Young said. "But it's getting to that point in position with enough freshness in my legs. Honestly, it's almost 99 percent of the whole sprint."

Case in point: the rider who won the World-Tour sprint at 1,097 watts averaged 490 watts for the last three minutes and 600 watts for the last 64 seconds, and all with a lead-out train. Those are WorldTour numbers.

Thankfully, positioning is trainable.

Even a rider who isn't that fast can do well if they are in the right position at the right time. No matter how strong someone is, they won't pass you if they are two wheel-lengths behind you.

If Young has one clear message, it's that sprinting isn't a 15-second drag race. It's a chess game, and every game is different. That's what makes sprinting so difficult to master.

It's also unforgiving. On a 20-minute finishing climb, climbers can afford a few errors. In a sprint, a single mistake in the last five minutes can cost you the race.

"That's equally the most frustrating aspect, but incredibly rewarding because you can look back and say 'I did everything right that I could have done,'" Young said.

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POSITIONING FOR THE WIN



YOUNG TAKING VICTORY AT THE TOUR OF UTAH

Whether you can generate 1,600 or 600 watts, here are some tips from Young on how to handle the most exciting finish in bike racing

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The final 15 seconds comes down to those genetic gifts of power. But the hard part is getting there. "What you can train a lot is how you ride the last three or four kilometers of a race and how you manage yourself: your mentality, your strategy, what wheels you're following," Young said.

EXPERIMENT

The problem is there's no formula for positioning. Every finish is different. It may be uphill, or downhill, or have a corner at 150 meters to go. "It takes a willingness to try things that you're not initially comfortable with and learn from them," Young said. You're not going to know if you can win a sprint by lighting it up at 300 meters to go until you try.

THEN ANALYZE

Once you've experimented, Young recommended immediately analyzing the race. Trace backward. "Now that I know what that feels like, where do I need to be at one kilometer to go, two kilometers to go... in order to do this at 200 meters," he said.

JUST DO IT

Young has lost a lot of races by waiting too long for the perfect moment. "My rule of thumb is when in doubt, lead it out," he said. He found there's nothing more frustrating than crossing the line with gas left in the tank. This is especially important for newer riders who don't yet know their limits. "The only way you're going to figure it out is by messing up and losing."

YOU CAN STILL TRAIN IT

We can improve what we have even if it's just 800 to 1,000 watts. However, your sprints don't need to be long. In studies, 30- and 15-second sprints produced identical gains. Just rest two to four minutes in between so you're fully recovered for the next sprint.

SPINNING TO THE WIN

Multiple studies have found that pedaling at 130rpm is optimal for peak power. And some sprinters touch 160rpm. It allows them to accelerate and respond to moves better, Young said. Young uses a fixed-gear bike and track riding to work on his cadence. But short of those, "it's really simple: little ring sprints," he said. Try it on a group ride. You'll struggle just to hold on, but you're still learning and your body's adapting. Young also recommended downhill sprints to simulate sprinting at high speed.

SPINNING IN CIRCLES

A study of sprinters found that they didn't fully recruit their muscle fibers even at peak power. Instead, the greater power came from using each muscle for a longer portion of the pedal stroke. So, spend time focusing on pedaling in circles to train each muscle to work longer.

WEIGHT FOR IT

"One thing that I do in the off-season is a fair bit of gym work," Young said. "Sprinting is a very different demand on your body." Hit the quads and the triceps surae in the calves, which account for most of your sprinting power. But don't just train the legs. "Sprinters look a lot more like normal people because you have to use your whole body."

NO ROOM FOR ERROR

Identify your biggest weaknesses in the sprint and focus on them. They may not be physical. "Sometimes it's cornering or a willingness to jump right up next to the wheel in front of you," Young said.

REACT FAST

All-out sprints of four seconds or less produce little fatigue and are very repeatable. So when positioning in those last five minutes, react fast to keep your jumps short. Take 10 seconds to close a gap and your sprint may be over.

GET AERO

Remember, over 70 percent of a sprinter's work goes into fighting drag. Top sprinters get low and are surprisingly aero.

USE TEAMMATES

"If you have a few teammates and they are willing to work for you, then that's a great place to start," Young said. Even if other riders come around your train, "you'll still be in a position to jump onto that third wheel."

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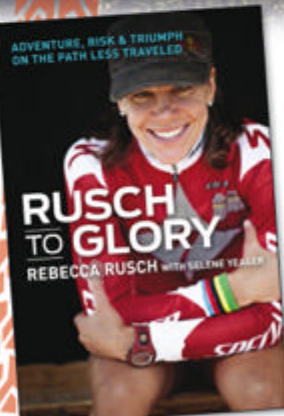
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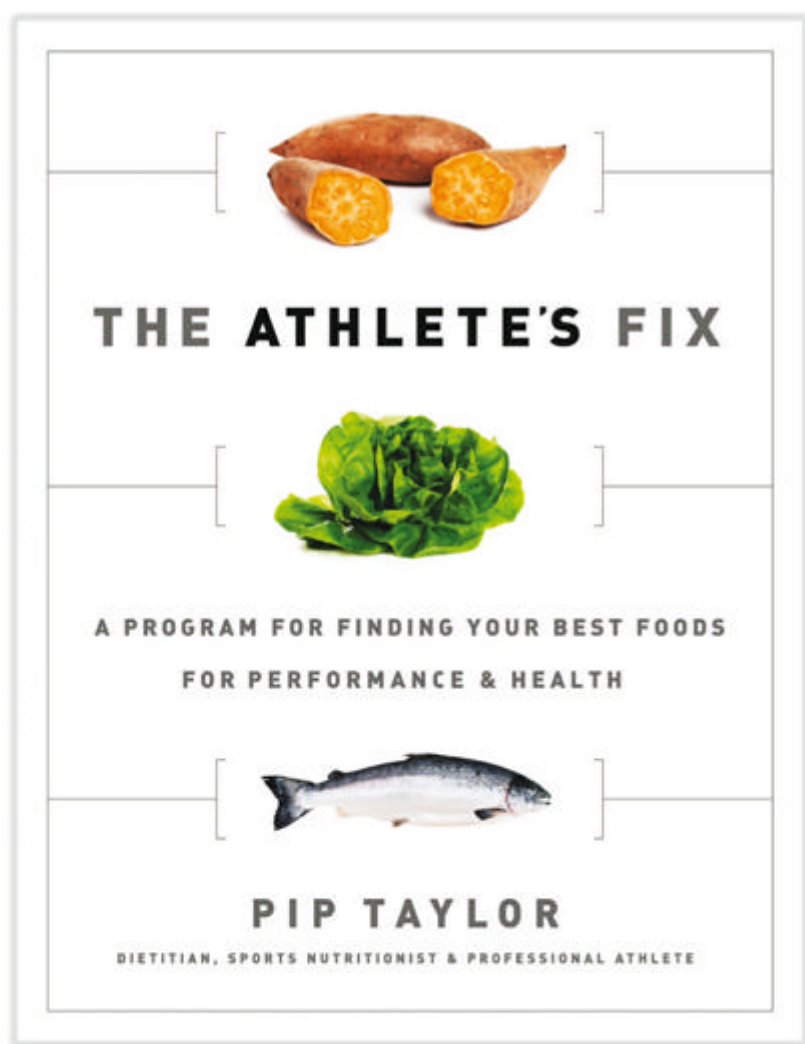
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You've seen the grainy, black and white image: A dark silhouette emerging from the waters of Scotland's famed Loch Ness, purporting to provide proof of the existence of the elusive Loch Ness Monster. The photo, first published in April of 1934, was credited for decades to British surgeon Robert Wilson. But the truth is that neither the photograph nor the story of its origins is authentic.

"The surgeon's photo" was actually the handiwork of Marmaduke Wetherell, a big game hunter hired by London's Daily Mail in 1933 to find the mythical creature. When Wetherell's unsuccessful efforts led to his ridicule, he convinced his stepson, Christian Spurling, a talented sculptor, to fashion a serpent's head. The pair attached it to a toy submarine and set it adrift, colluding with Wilson to present the resulting photo to the paper as authentic. It was not until 1994, when Spurling revealed the plot on his deathbed, that the world learned for certain that the photo was a hoax.

If there's anything that captures our imagination as a people, it's the pursuit of things we aren't quite sure exist. We're fascinated by ghosts and aliens, and dedicate hours of cable television to the hunt for redeeming value within the Kardashian family. But now the search is on within the world of cycling.

In March, the UCI and Italian police temporarily seized 36 bikes at the finish of Milano-Sanremo, including those of podium finishers John Degenkolb, Alexander Kristoff, and Michael Matthews, to check for hidden motors. Shortly thereafter, the UCI introduced new sanctions designed to prevent "motorized doping." The question is: Have they lost their minds?

The answer would seem to depend on whom you ask. On the one

hand, naysayers dismiss the searches as paranoid snipe hunts — a Wetherell-style pursuit of technology that simply does not exist. The Loch Ness Crankset, if you will.

But credible sources, including UCI president Brian Cookson and American Tour de France champion Greg LeMond, cautioned that the technology is quite real and may already have seen use within the pro peloton. Indeed, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* suggested that more than 1,200 such motors have recently been sold in Italy alone.

"I know that motors exist; I've ridden a bike with one and I've met the inventor and talked about it," LeMond told *Cyclingnews.com* in May. "If people think they don't exist, they're fooling themselves, so I think it's a justified suspicion. I believe it's also been used in the peloton. It seems too incredible that someone would do it, but I know it's real."

Fueled in part by viral videos, the prospect of motorized doping has garnered increasing attention since 2010, when YouTube conspiracy theories about Fabian Cancellara's dominating wins at Flanders and Roubaix started tongues

wagging. A more recent incident in which Ryder Hesjedal's rear wheel appeared to continue propelling his bike after a 2014 Vuelta a España crash spawned dozens of uploads to the video site, including plenty by physics-savvy users seeking to disprove the motor theory using Newton's first law of motion.

The incident got more than its fair share of attention, however, which may be why Hesjedal expressed his exasperation upon having his bike inspected by UCI officials after stage 18 of May's Giro d'Italia.

"It's the stupidest thing. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of," the Canadian told *Velo*. "It's not possible. It's just not possible."

Electric assist bicycles have long been available on the market, of course, but they're hardly inconspicuous — with bulky batteries and perceptible noise associated with their operation. Whether a sufficiently small and silent prototype exists to wreak havoc in the peloton is apparently beside the point. The UCI appears ready to flex their muscle on the issue, disassembling bikes at the finish line and enacting minimum six-month suspensions and financial penalties of up to 1 million Swiss Francs for both riders and teams engaged in "technological fraud."

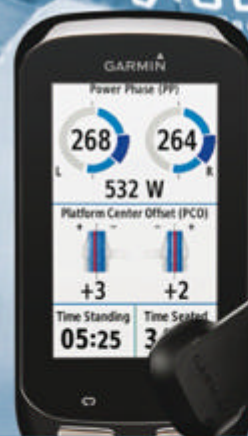
Given cycling's history, it's hard to criticize the UCI for taking a proactive approach to the prevention of cheating. But until it's established that the technology in question actually exists, no one will blame you for snickering at the UCI's efforts to ensure that Alberto Contador's bottom bracket isn't filled with leprechauns. **W**

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